

Chapter 5

Jewish Kabbalah

Hayyim Vital's *Shaarei Kedusha*

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Reading in translation is like kissing through a veil.

—Hayyim Nahman Bialik

Translation is one of the greatest miracles . . . leading into the heart of the sacred order from which it springs . . .”

—Gershom Scholem, letter to Franz Rosenzweig, March 7, 1921

The *Shaarei Kedusha* (Gates of Holiness) is a late sixteenth-century work of Jewish Kabbalah in four parts. Originally written in Hebrew, the text was composed by Hayyim ben Joseph Calabrezi Vital (1542–1620), a rabbi and mystic in the Galilean city of Safed, Palestine, and the foremost disciple of Isaac Luria (the Ari; 1534–1572). The text is thus associated with the Lurianic line of Jewish meditative and theosophical Kabbalah. This line is also referred to as the “Safed school.” The *Shaarei Kedusha* is an esoteric text. The fourth part, which is the focus of the present chapter, is an extended essay on contemplative techniques and the devotional prerequisites for attaining prophecy. It was intentionally excised from the standard printings of *Shaarei Kedusha* and was circulated in manuscript in small Kabbalistic groups. It was published for the first time by the contemporary Jerusalem Kabbalist rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel in a collected work titled *Ketavim Hadashim shel R. Hayyim Vital* (New Writings from Rabbi Hayyim Vital) in 1988. The text describes a highly complex form of Jewish meditation, largely lost in the modern world, that includes magical reconfigurations of Hebrew letter combinations. Rooted in traditional rabbinic/mystical Judaism, the text was written for Vital’s own community and for members of the line of Lurianic Kabbalah.

Sixteenth-Century Safed, Isaac Luria, and Hayyim Vital

In contemporary Israel, the city of Safed, nestled in the Galilean hills, is the center of the Jewish mysticism tourist industry. Considered a "development town" by the state, modern-day Safed is a place of many layers combining impoverished immigrants, a mosaic of countercultural artists and ultra-Orthodox Jews, and a dwindling Arab population. The tourist industry is centered on the artist colony and the old cemetery where some of the great luminaries of Safed's past are buried. The central figure remains the charismatic Kabbalist Isaac Luria, who spent less than eighteen months in Safed before succumbing to a plague in the summer of 1572. Perhaps somewhat ironically, Hayyim Vital, who was instrumental in making Luria the figure he is today, is not buried in Safed but in Damascus, Syria.

This history of Safed certainly lends itself to its present celebrity status but is also more multivalent (see David 1999; Fine 2003, 41–77). It was a center of enormous Kabbalistic and rabbinic activity in the middle decades of the sixteenth century as well as the home of some well-known Sufi masters (see Fenton 1994). It is considered one of the four "holy cities" of Erez Israel, with the others being Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Hebron. There is no mention of Safed in the Hebrew Bible and only scant mention in rabbinic literature.¹ In the Middle Ages, it is mentioned by various Jewish travelers on pilgrimage in the Holy Land. By the early 1500s Safed began to emerge as a central locale for many immigrants from Spain and Portugal and as arguably the most important city in Palestine during the early Ottoman period (see, e.g., David 1991, 1992). It became a textile and manufacturing center given its proximity to Damascus, which was the urban center of that part of the empire (see Avisur 1962; David 1988). Safed's Jewish population grew tremendously during that period. According to one account, between 1567 and 1568 there may have been as many as 1,800 Jewish families, which is quite large given the size of the city (see Fine 2003, 47). It became a central location of Jewish jurisprudence. Jacob Berab (ca. 1474–ca. 1541) and the more well-known Joseph Caro (1488–1575), who emigrated from Turkey, functioned as rabbinic authorities. Caro's *Shulhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law; lit., Set Table) was composed in Safed and became the standard code of Jewish law to this day. In the 1530s Kabbalists from the European continent began arriving in Safed (there was an old adage that the messiah will rise in Safed). One important figure was Shlomo Alkabetz (1505–1576) who emigrated from Salonika. Alkabetz is most well known as the author of the Sabbath-eve hymn "Lekha Dodi" (Go Out My Beloved), but he was also the transmitter of Kabbalah that he had learned in an important circle of Kabbalists in Salonika. He became the brother-in-law and teacher of Moshe Cordovero, who rose to become the most important Kabbalist in Safed until the arrival of Luria in 1570.

Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570) (known as RAMAK) was the leading Kabbalist in Safed in the sixteenth century, at least until Luria arrived less than a year before Cordovero's death in 1570. Cordovero's magnum opus *Perdes Rimonim* (Pomegranate Orchard) was a compendium of medieval Kabbalistic doctrine filtered through his distinctive dialectical approach founded on the notion that for God to reveal Godself, God had to be concealed. His position was Neoplatonic in that he believed in an emanation of cosmic forces downward as opposed to Luria who proffered a theory of divine rupture that contained more gnostic elements. He may have been most popularly known as the author of a series of works on ethics founded on Kabbalistic principles.²

These mystical figures in Safed began attracting many young Kabbalists from the Jewish Diaspora, which resulted in one of the most vibrant Kabbalistic communities that the Jewish

world has ever known. As a Safed native, the precocious Hayyim Vital took advantage of his surroundings, studying with these older luminaries and rising to become a young protégé in this community.³ In addition to the metaphysical work going on, these mystics, many of whom were in Erez Israel for the first time, initiated an ascetic lifestyle in preparation for what they believed was the beginning of the messianic age. One outgrowth of this was an attempt to reinstitute formal rabbinic ordination as a prerequisite for reconstituting the Sanhedrin that had been disbanded after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE (see Katz 1986; Fine 2003, 51–53). After the demise of the Sanhedrin, or official legal court, during the times of the Jerusalem Temple in the first century of the Common Era, official rabbinical ordination that was required to be a member of the Sanhedrin ceased as it was no longer relevant. Reestablishing official ordination was viewed as a prelude to coming of the messiah and the final redemption. This is noteworthy because Vital was very much a part of this circle and was one of the few who eventually did receive formal ordination.

As we can see, Hayyim Vital was at the center of what was arguably one of the most vibrant decades of Jewish literature in post-rabbinic history, both exoteric and esoteric. In the course of about forty years, from the mid-1530s until the mid-1570s, the scholars in Safed literally revolutionized Jewish life. During this time, the Jewish legal tradition achieved a universally accepted code of law in the *Shulhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law), a Kabbalistic corpus that collected and summarized early Kabbalah in the works of Moshe Cordovero, and a revolutionary metaphysical system that became the foundation of subsequent Kabbalah and Hasidism in the works of Isaac Luria. In addition, during this time certain customs were initiated that became standard Jewish practice. This included the Kabbalat Shabbat service for Friday evening, the custom of staying awake through the night studying Torah on Shavuot (Pentecost), and the more esoteric custom of Tikkun Hazot, a nightly midnight vigil to mourn the destruction of the Temple. This nocturnal ritual was developed and practiced by mystics to lament the destruction of the Temple and hasten its rebuilding through liturgical dirges, lamentations, and meditations while sitting on the floor and placing ashes on one's head (Magid 1996a). While the latter did not gain universal appeal, it was common among pious circles in subsequent centuries.⁴ Hayyim Vital's *Shaarei Kedusha* (Gates of Holiness) should thus be seen as the product of an individual who absorbed both the earlier Kabbalistic tradition as well as its new articulation, an individual who stood inside a community intent on completing Jewish exile by means of ascetic piety in preparing for the reemergence of prophecy, at a time when members of his elite circle viewed their time as on the precipice of a seismic shift that required immediate and radical action. The Kabbalists in Safed were pious, even extremely so, but they were not a cautious group; they believed audacity was required to complete their task.

Descended from a family of Italian Jews from Calabria, Hayyim Vital (1542–1620) was likely born in Safed. His father was a well-known scribe. As a young man Vital studied with the popular preacher Moshe Alshekh (1508–1593) and later with the celebrated Kabbalist Moshe Cordovero.⁵ Vital always had esoteric interests and as a young man spent two years studying alchemy, probably in Damascus, an activity he later regretted (see, e.g., Boss 1994). His life changed in 1570 when an unknown and charismatic young Kabbalist named Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (the Ari; 1534–1572) immigrated to Safed from Egypt (Fine 2003, 19–40). Cordovero died in the summer of 1570, and in the spring of 1571 Vital joined a group gathering around the charismatic Luria. He had already studied Kabbalah with Cordovero and soon asserted himself as

Luria's closest disciple (Fine 2003, 333–50). The relationship between master and disciple appears to have been a complicated one. According to Vital's account, Luria held that he had messianic potential, and he claimed that Luria told him that he (Luria) came into this world only to teach Vital the true Kabbalah.⁶

Isaac Luria was born in Jerusalem. His father died when he was a child and his mother moved with him to Egypt to live with her wealthy brother Mordecai Frances. Luria was raised in Egypt and became a young prodigy of David ibn Zamra, one of the leading jurists at that time. As far as we know, he began studying Kabbalah at an early age. A common story has it that Luria spent almost ten years living on an island in the Nile Jazirat al-Rawda (the island was owned by his uncle), returning home only for Shabbat, where he studied esoteric wisdom. We have no record of his teacher in Kabbalah. He immigrated to Safed in 1570 to study with Moshe Cordovero. A few months after commencing with his study, differences between him and his teacher began to surface regarding interpretations of the *Zohar*, and very soon afterward Cordovero died. Luria quickly became a central figure in Safed, and many of Cordovero's students, Vital included, drifted over to Luria and became his main disciples.

Luria is best known for his innovative use of the doctrine of *zimzum*, an idea that God contracted Godself to create an empty space for creation. Once God emanates light into that space that is void of divinity, the light was too strong for the vessels to contain it and the vessels ruptured, sending sparks of divinity into the netherworld. Evil thus emerges from this broken world, and the Jew, through acts of piety (*mitzvot*), redeems these trapped sparks from the grips of evil to redeem the world. His second innovation was to expand the cosmology of the ten *sephirot* (divine emanations) into cosmic constellations or faces (*parzufim*) that interact with one another throughout the day, shifting in order to allow divine light to flow through them and into the world. Vital became Luria's major interpreter after years of battling with other more seasoned disciples. He attained almost a clear advantage of Luria's other students when Vital's son, Samuel, began publishing Vital's rendition of the Lurianic system soon after Vital's death.⁷

Vital had a very high opinion of himself, which explains his obsession in arguing for hegemony over Luria's teachings. He makes this quite explicit in his diary published as *Sefer Hizonot* (Book of Visions), which was likely written between 1609 and 1612.⁸ After Luria's death in the summer of 1572, Vital resided in various locations, including Jerusalem, where he served as rabbi, and in Damascus, periodically returning to Safed. A series of plagues ravaged Safed, and its vibrant Jewish life dwindled in the later decades of the sixteenth century. Many of Luria's students scattered. Some traveled to Poland or Italy; others went to Jerusalem or Damascus, which was a vibrant commercial city at that time and in close proximity to the Land of Israel; and still others moved to various locations in the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922). Vital spent his years after Luria's death editing and revising his version of the Lurianic system as well as dedicating time to the rabbinate in Jerusalem and teaching and writing about both exoteric and esoteric matters. He was known to be a prickly individual, not easy to get along with, and very critical of anyone who challenged his messianic self-fashioning. His *Sefer Hizonot* is replete with disparaging remarks about many of his colleagues in Safed and Damascus, accusing them of all kinds of debauchery and ignorance of the true Kabbalistic tradition. He even suggests that he failed to be revealed as the true messiah due to the sins of the Jews of Damascus.⁹ After a series of very serious and extended illnesses, Vital died in Damascus in the spring of 1620 at the age of seventy-seven.¹⁰

His son Samuel and grandson Moshe became the inheritors and editors of Vital's literary estate and were responsible for the body of Vital's rendition of Luria's teaching that were later printed as the *Etz Hayyim* (Tree of Life) and *Shemoneh Shearim* (Eight Gates). With the publication of these works, Vital became the dominant lens through which to study Lurianic Kabbalah. Gershom Scholem claims that although Vital "possessed no truly creative powers, [he] was one of the most important influences on the development of later Kabbalah, attaining this position as the chief formulator of the Kabbalah of Luria" (Scholem 1974, 448). Scholem here is speaking only of his contribution to Kabbalistic metaphysics, but we can see his point even in reading the *Shaarei Kedusha*. There is little that is original in this work, albeit his juxtaposition of older sources and his interpretive explanations are often illuminating. The style is taken from pietistic works written by older contemporaries such as Elijah da Vidas (1518–1592) and his one-time teacher Moshe Cordovero. His meditative techniques are quite similar to Abraham Abulafia (1240–after 1291) (discussed later in this chapter), although, again, he offers some new interpretations. However, the *Shaarei Kedusha*, especially its unpublished fourth part, came to represent one of the most concise and illustrative examples of late Kabbalistic contemplative practice of this period with a focus on the renewal of prophecy that was later taken up by various Kabbalists and Hasidic masters.

It is curious that Gershom Scholem's biographical sketch of Vital only mentions the *Shaarei Kedusha* in passing and does not tell us when it was written. In addition, Scholem does not mention the enigmatic fourth part that was still in manuscript when he wrote his essay. Moreover, Joseph Avivi wrote two massive bibliographical studies on Lurianic Kabbalah, *Binyan Ariel* (Building of Ariel) and *Kabbalat Ha-Ari* (Kabbalah of the ARI, Isaac Luria), which treat Vital's work extensively but which all but ignore the *Shaarei Kedusha* (Avivi 1987, 2008). This is somewhat ironic in part because the *Shaarei Kedusha* became one of the most widely read works attributed to Vital. If we had more exact data on when it was written, whether he continued working on it after meeting Luria, and if it was edited by his son and grandson after his death, we would be able to ascertain its somewhat idiosyncratic nature. The fact that Vital knew Elijah da Vidas, the author of the popular pietistic work *Reshit Hokhma* (Beginning of Wisdom), the style of the first three parts of *Shaarei Kedusha* makes perfect sense. It was clearly written at a time when works of pious asceticism were common. Given that Vital studied with Cordovero, who seemed quite aware of the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, it makes sense when we read the fourth part in which Abulafia is prominent. We must remember that at this time Abulafia's works were all in manuscript form and his Kabbalistic system had suffered from severe criticism in the centuries after his death. By the sixteenth century, the theosophical Kabbalah of the *Zohar* (that appeared after Abulafia's death), a series of texts that develop a cosmology very different than Abulafia's "letter mysticism," had become the template of all subsequent Kabbalistic activity. Thus in including Abulafia's works Vital was acting in an audacious manner. There are those who posit that the fourth gate remained unpublished until very recently because of its overt use of Abulafian techniques. Scholem notes that Vital had a strong interest in early Kabbalah; he claims that a manuscript exists that was likely the product of his own hand discovered in 1930 (Scholem 1974, 448). If this is so, the anthological section of part 4 of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, which comprises its largest section, may be part of a project that Vital never brought to completion. Finally, whether or not we accept Gershom Scholem's thesis regarding the messianic underpinnings of Lurianic Kabbalah as a response to the Spanish expulsion in 1492, it seems clear that messianism was part

of the religious culture in Safed at that time.¹¹ And Vital certainly viewed himself as a messianic figure and one fit to receive the revelation of the Holy Spirit and even prophecy.¹² In that light, Vital's focus on the renewal of prophecy that is part of the messianic process in classical Judaism, both in part 3 and part 4 of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, would fit neatly into Vital's project in the text.

Rabbinic Judaism and Lurianic Kabbalah

Rabbinic Judaism refers to the body of literature written and redacted by an elite group of Jews—often viewed as the spiritual inheritors of the Pharisees—from the second to the sixth centuries CE. The products of this literary enterprise are known as Talmud and Midrash. The Talmud refers to two separate but overlapping corpora known as the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds, the former being the dominant record of rabbinic teachings redacted in Babylonia (an area including Persia and parts of modern-day Iran and Iraq) from the fourth to sixth centuries. Midrash refers to a body of nonlegal, homiletic literature appearing in various forms during the same period also extending in some cases to the early Middle Ages. The most well-known Midrash is known as Midrash Raba (2nd–5th c.) and consists of a running commentary to the Pentateuch (Fraade 2007).

The focus of Rabbinic Judaism is the adjudication and practice of law as the central tenet of Jewish living. Nonlegal dimensions of Rabbinic Judaism include creative interpretations of biblical passages, stories of the rabbis, and a small amount of what can be called proto-mystical doctrine. By that I mean stories of miraculous events and feats performed by the rabbinic sages. Rabbinic Judaism has no systematic mystical system, and scholars are unsure whether such systems existed among Rabbinic Jews until the Middle Ages.

The mystics in Safed were solidly Rabbinic Jews in that they accepted the rabbinic corpus as authoritative and lived by its precepts (Scholem 1965, 5–31). Much of their mystical Judaism is built on interpretations of biblical and rabbinic texts. Jewish mystics of this period were strict adherents to rabbinic law and often offered supererogatory interpretations of normative practice (Hallamish 1988). As a result of their strict adherence to Rabbinic Judaism, many of their contemplative techniques are developed in conjunction with the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments) or ritual acts prescribed by the rabbinic sages (Hallamish 2000). Sometimes they are practiced as part of the act itself, for example, in the shaking of the *lulav* and *etrog* (palm branch and citron fruit) on Sukkot (Festival of Booths/Tabernacles) and sometimes as an accompaniment to the ritual act, for example, in traditional liturgy (Kallus 2002). There are also a few cases where new rituals are invented to accompany contemplative practice, for example, in the midnight prayer vigil Tikkun Hazot (Rectification at Midnight) or all-night study ritual of Shavuot and Hoshanah Raba, the final day of Sukkot (Scholem 1965, 118–57).

In many cases, mystics also served as legal authorities, as was the case with Cordovero, Vital, and to a lesser extent Luria (Hallamish 1992). Many served on rabbinic courts, rendered legal decisions, and conferred with their nonmystical legal colleagues on matters of law and custom (Katz 1989, 45–58). That being said, Jewish mystics, especially of this period, often studied in secluded circles (sometimes known as *kloyzim*), were very strict about who was included in these circles, and demanded a high level of secrecy in terms of their program of study. As a result, it

is unclear how many citizens of Safed knew about this mystical revolution that was going on in their environs. Many of these groups were largely nocturnal, gathering when most of Safed's residents were asleep. The townspeople knew of the main figures such as Cordovero and Vital, especially because Cordovero was a leading rabbinic figure and Vital was a longtime resident of Safed, but as to the nature of their devotional practices and teaching, it is not clear how much of their mystical activities were known in their lifetime. This may be especially the case in Safed since the city at that time was an amalgam of many new immigrants from various parts of the Jewish world. Jews from Portugal, Egypt, Salonika, Italy, Poland, and other locales immigrated to Safed in the sixteenth century. Some came as a result of the demographic shift after the expulsions from Iberia; others came because of Sultan Bayazid II's (r. 1481–1512) tolerant attitude toward Jews; and still others because of the mystical tradition that the messiah will come from Safed. As a result, many probably did not even share a common language (Hebrew was not the *lingua franca* in Safed) (David 1988, 1991, 1992, 1999).

Lurianic Kabbalah was an innovative metaphysical system founded on the principles of *zimzum* (divine contraction) and *shvirat ha-kelim* (the rupture of the vessels). In brief, Luria posited that creation began with an act of divine contraction whereby God removed Godself to create a space void of God that would then be infused with a diluted light of divinity giving birth to the material world. In fact, this process seemed to fail. The void (not totally void of God but rather the place of a much-diminished divine light that served as vessels to hold the emanated light from beyond the empty space) could not hold the emanated light and the "vessels" shattered, sending shards deeper into the dark void, known as the *tehom* (depths), which became the place of the demonic (Fine 2003, 124–49). The demonic was fed by this divinity and gained strength as a result of this failed attempt at creation. Our world is thus already the place of an exiled God, or exiled divinity (Magid 2002, 172–75). The purpose of Torah and *mitzvot* is that through abiding by divine command Jews slowly redeem these lost sparks from their embedded place in the demonic and raise them up to their appropriate place in the Godhead (Jacobs 1989). Moreover, these acts realign the cosmos that is malfunctioning due to the fallen state of creation. Lurianic Kabbalah, more than most Kabbalistic systems before it, is devoted to *mitzvot* as the tools of the mystic to redeem the sparks and realign the cosmos in order for the creation to complete itself in the redemptive era. It is thus a highly ritualistic contemplative system, one that embeds meditative practice with bodily actions connected to the web of Jewish legal literature (*halakha*). It is thus not surprising that Joseph Karo (1488–1575), a significant resident of Safed in this period and also a mystic, composed the *Shulhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) that became the standard legal guidebook of post-medieval Judaism (Werblowsky 1980).

The central texts of the Lurianic school are Vital's *Etz Hayyim* (Tree of Life) and *Shemoneh Shearim* (Eight Gates), edited by his son Samuel. Many other students of Luria wrote their own works that are studied today, but the Vitalean rendition of Luria's teachings have dominated modern Kabbalah (Meroz 1993). In many cases, these other Lurianic texts were interpreted through the lens of Vital's collections, thus diminishing the more multivalent nature of Luria's work in the decades after his death in 1572. Scholars like to draw these distinctions, especially regarding the works of Israel Sarug (d. 1610), whose relationship to Luria is matter of scholarly debate (Meroz 1992). Sarug's work made its way to Italy and became popularized by numerous Kabbalists, most notably Menahem Azariah da Fano (1548–1620), once a student of Cordovero,

who was instrumental in disseminating Lurianic manuscripts in Europe. Sarug's system differed from Vital's in numerous ways that are not really relevant to our consideration of the *Shaarei Kedusha*.

As a result of the ritualistic nature of Lurianic Kabbalah, many compendia were composed refracting the Lurianic metaphysical myth through the lens of ritual and law. The *Shaarei Kedusha* was thus written in the midst of a highly ritualized and mystical environment. As distinguished from many of the other treatises written at this time, the *Shaarei Kedusha* does not focus on the practice of ritual per se but rather on preparations for a mystically ritualized life. Leaning heavily on the metaphysical literature that Vital and others wrote, the *Shaarei Kedusha* focuses on the personality and discipline necessary to enact these contemplative practices, on cultivating the contemplative personality. The *Shaarei Kedusha* thus constitutes a kind of early modern pietism based on a newly formed mystical doctrine embedded in an ascetic and highly charged form of normative Judaism.

The Journey to YHVH through Hebrew

The search for an experience of God in Judaism reaches back to the Hebrew Bible and the prophets. Moses's desire to "see God" (Exod. 33:18) and the prophets' attempt to experience the divine stand as a central motif of biblical religion. Even in the rabbinic tradition, which is more interested in creating normative practice than fostering religious or mystical experience, we have many instances where rabbinic sages utilize methods in order to break through the divide separating the corporeal realm and the supernal heavens (e.g., Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 14b). In this sense, Kabbalah as mystical doctrine is not a deviation from Ancient Israelite religion, although its focus on experience as the *sine qua non* of its religious worldview does depart from its rabbinic antecedents, if not in essence then surely in emphasis.

That being said, Kabbalists were by and large also legal scholars, and Kabbalistic doctrine is built on the foundation of the obligatory nature of religious praxis (known as *halakha* [Jewish law]) (see, e.g., Katz 1983, 3–60). The Kabbalists exhibit an interesting mix of radicalism and conservatism; at times their radicalism is embedded in a highly conservative devotion to law as the vehicle of mystical experience. There are some notable exceptions, such as Abraham Abulafia (discussed later in this chapter), but for the most part Kabbalists were defenders and strict keepers of the law.¹³ However, as in the case with many mystical traditions, there is also a tension between the law and experience in Kabbalah, and this tension is palpable in many Kabbalistic texts.

Kabbalah began in earnest sometime in the twelfth century in Provence with a circle of mystics around an enigmatic figure known as Isaac the Blind (see Scholem 1962, 248–89; cf. Sendor 1994).¹⁴ Around this time we also find perhaps the first Kabbalistic text known as *Sefer Ha-Bahir* (Book of Illumination) (Scholem 1962, 49–198). This text, framed as a rabbinic Midrash, begins to develop the doctrine of the ten *sephirot* (divine pronouncements/attributes/emanations), although in the *Bahir* these *sephirot* do not constitute fully developed distinct divine emanations as they do in the *Zohar* (Book of Radiance), which is the great text of Kabbalah that was the product of the late thirteenth century. While the *Bahir* makes mention of its characters having mystical experiences that then translated into esoteric teachings, one could not call it a

contemplative text, and the techniques are too oblique to constitute any contemplative method.¹⁵ Descriptions of mystics sitting with their heads between their knees and entering the supernal realm are likely taken from descriptions of prophecy that appear in the rabbinic corpus.

The *Zohar* revolutionized Kabbalah with its intricate doctrine of the ten *sephirot* and complex cosmology, cosmogony, and theodicy (Green 2004). While the *Zohar* speaks often about its characters having mystical experiences, and its theosophy certainly assumes as much, it does not devote much time to exploring contemplative techniques. Its interests are primarily theosophical, exploring the highways and byways of the cosmic universe that is situated between God (as *eyn sof*, the Infinite) and the corporeal realm.

Lurianic Kabbalah, of which Vital was a central expositor, extends Zoharic theosophy to new levels of complexity. In addition, and more relevant to our concerns here, it introduces certain contemplative techniques, described as *kavannot* (mystical intentions) that accompany the performance of *mitzvot* (see Matt 1986, 367–404). In this sense, Lurianic Kabbalah introduces a practical or perhaps applicatory dimension to the theosophical Kabbalah of the *Zohar*. Yet even here, most of the discussion centers on internal computation and the intricate tracing of cosmic movement rather than actual physical techniques for attaining the desired experience (Kallus 2002; Giller 2008).

One of the interesting dimensions of Vital's *Shaarei Kedusha* is that here he moves Lurianic theosophy much closer to the practical realm. In this text, which can be viewed as a kind of guidebook for mystical practice according to the Lurianic system, Vital simplifies the complex theosophy and focuses on applying it in a contemplative framework. Much of the first three parts discuss the prerequisites for attempting to attain a mystical experience. Here he leans heavily on the approach of two ethical texts by his former teacher Moshe Cordovero, namely, the *Tomer Devorah* (Palm Tree of Deborah) and *Or Neenav* (Concealed Light). Vital, like his teacher, argues that the mystic must be punctilious in his performance of *mitzvot*, must be conversant in the large body of rabbinic and classical literature, and must exhibit a sincere passion for the mystical quest. Moreover, he must be careful in his dealings with others, even more so than the nonmystic. Ethical infractions, even if they are not legal transgressions, can disqualify one from the mystical life. He must also be an expert in mystical doctrine and must be assiduous in ascetic practices such as fasting, sleep deprivation, weeping, and minimizing sexual contact to prescribed times, that is, solely for the sake of procreation or pleasing his wife (*onat isha*). Vital's ascetic worldview would be familiar to Christian monastic and Muslim Sufi mystics, viewing the body and its appetites in a negative light, trying to separate his spiritual self (soul) from his carnal self (body), and striving to nullify the self as much as possible in preparation for the nullification (*bitul*) that is endemic to the mystical experience.

While the *Shaarei Kedusha* is rooted in a combination of Cordoverean ethical discipline and Lurianic theosophy, neither Cordovero nor Luria go into great detail about the practical dimensions of contemplative practice. It is here where the *Shaarei Kedusha*, especially its fourth part, should be of interest to scholars of contemplative practice and mysticism. While Vital alludes to certain practical applications of contemplation in the third part of his text, focusing there on *devekut*, or communion with the divine, in the fourth part he is more explicit in terms of practical techniques. In order to better transition from theosophy to contemplation, Vital introduces certain techniques expounded by the iconoclastic medieval mystic Abraham Abulafia, utilizing them within the theosophical system of Cordovero and Luria.

Abulafia's work is explicit in offering details of breathing techniques, visualizations of letter permutations, and body movements to simulate Hebrew letters in motion, all as methods to facilitate the meditative and contemplative experience (see Idel 1988a, 13–54). Abulafia did not accept the theosophical Kabbalistic systems of his time uncritically (he worked before the *Zohar* took its final form but other theosophical systems were already extant in southern Europe) and developed a distinct kind of letter mysticism based on letter visualization combined with a neo-Aristotelian philosophical worldview.¹⁶ He is, for example, much more sympathetic to Moses Maimonides's (1135–1204) philosophical *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed) than mystics influenced by the *Zohar*. His correlation between the intellect and the soul is more in line with Maimonides than many of the more Neoplatonic mystics.

In any event, Vital does not incorporate Abulafia's system as such but tries to merge it with the systems of his teachers, albeit he must draw from Abulafia's letter mysticism to make it all work. Abulafia suffered severe critique by major rabbinic figures during his lifetime, which also continued after his passing. As a result, none of his texts were printed until the nineteenth century when the German scholar Adolph Jellinek included some of them in his compendia of mystical literature. Thus Vital's use of Abulafia was viewed negatively by many of his readers, even as Vital's credentials remained intact. This is one reason given why the first publishers of the *Shaarei Kedusha* conspicuously left out the fourth part in their printing of the text. As mentioned earlier, the fourth part remained in manuscript until it was published in the 1980s by Yaakov Moshe Hillel of Jerusalem. Hillel's published version contains a justificatory introduction, which unfortunately could not be included in my translation due to space considerations (see later discussion herein). It is important to note, however, that the publisher felt the need to justify why it is now appropriate to publish this text when previous generations of scholars forbade it. One reason given is that much of the Abulafia corpus was being published elsewhere in Jerusalem at the same time, thus erasing the informal ban of Abulafia's works.¹⁷

One of the significant consequences of the appearance of Abulafia's works and of the full text of the *Shaarei Kedusha* is the accessibility it rendered to those interested in meditation from a Jewish perspective. From the late 1970s and early 1980s until today a plethora of books have been written on "Jewish meditation," many utilizing these texts now available for the first time. While many of the new books on Jewish meditation are not scholarly but popular works, the availability of works such as the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* and Abulafia's books makes a significant contribution to this enterprise.¹⁸

For Kabbalists in general, the Hebrew language is an essential part of their mystical system, whether we are talking about more theosophical Kabbalah (the *Zohar*) or the letter mysticism of Abulafia. The status of the Hebrew language as mystical/magical or normative was an issue in classical Rabbinic Judaism as well as the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition (see, e.g., Idel 1989, 1–28). There are numerous Midrashic statements that suggest that the Hebrew letters preceded creation; for example, "Just as the Torah was given in Hebrew (*lashon ha-kodesh*), so too the world was created with Hebrew (*lashon ha-kodesh*)" (Midrash Genesis Raba 31:8). The important pre-Kabbalistic mystical tract *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) is a discussion about the mystical meanings of Hebrew letters, and this book was widely read and commented on throughout the history of Kabbalah. The commentary by the early Kabbalist Isaac the Blind was one of the most important early works of Kabbalah.

Even in the theosophical Kabbalah that emerged from the *Zohar* and later Lurianic Kabbalah that influenced Vital and the *Shaarei Kedusha*, the mystical dimensions of Hebrew remained central.

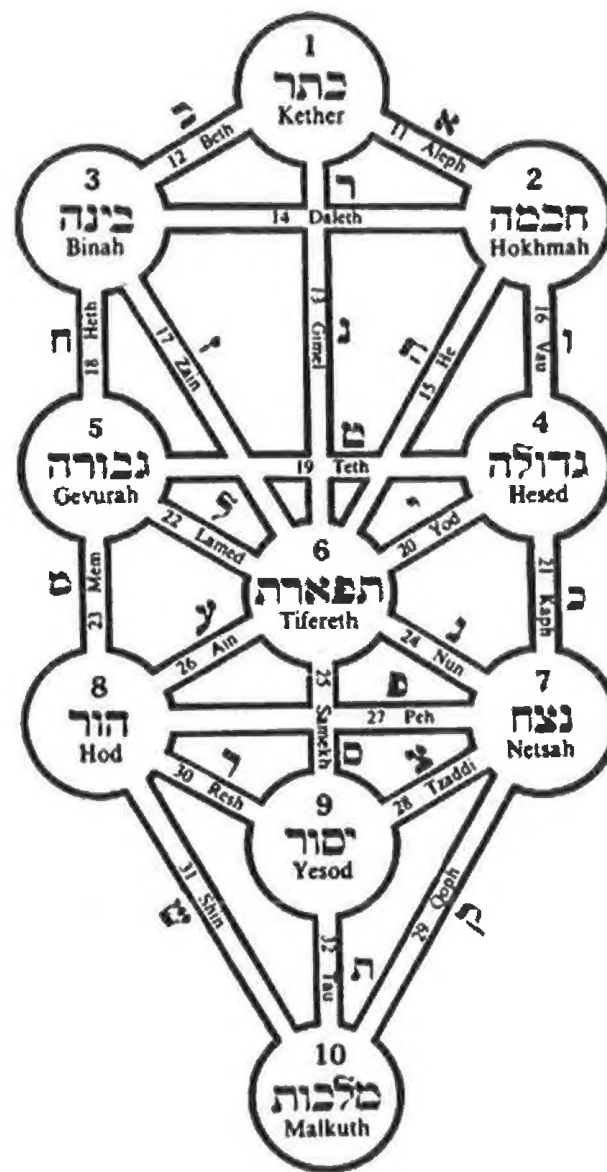


Figure 5.1. *Etz Hayyim* (Tree of Life)
The Ten Sephiroth

While theosophical Kabbalah is more focused on the ten *sephirot*, the Hebrew letters and their various permutations and numerical value are central to the meditative techniques. Each Hebrew letter is given a numerical value producing a system of numerology linking ostensibly disparate worlds of expressions. Since in Hebrew all letters are consonants, vocalization variants enable Kabbalists to manipulate language to create new connections and cultivate meditative techniques through the manipulation of letters. The notion that God is embedded in the Torah (as the Hebrew language) suggests what some have called a “Logos Theology” of textual embodiment whereby God is accessed through the language of Torah (see, e.g., Boyarin 2004, 112–27; Wolfson 2005, 190–261). In this regard the *Shaarei Kedusha* is similar to other Kabbalistic works of its genre, except for the fact that it openly incorporates Abulafian letter techniques into its theosophical system of the *sephirot*, which, by the sixteenth century, had become the normative template of Kabbalah.

The text of the fourth part of *Shaarei Kedusha* does not introduce any new terminology. It garners terms used by earlier Kabbalists and presents them in a frame that enables Vital’s contemplative program to take form. For our purposes the terms most relevant are *sephirot* (divine pronunciations/attributes/emanations), *hitbodedut* (contemplation), *devekut* (cleaving), *hishtavut* (equanimity), *ruah ha-kodesh* (holy spirit), and *nevuah* (prophecy). I will briefly discuss these terms and my choice to translate them as I did.

The regnant system of Kabbalah in the sixteenth century was based on the principle of the ten *sephirot*. Briefly, this is a cosmology that describes God as *eyn sof* (the Infinite; lit. without end) and spends little time on this unknowable dimension of divinity. Its focus is on the cosmos that it views as the mediation between the Infinite unknowable God and the universe/world. The ten *sephirot* are ten emanations, sometimes referred to in scholarship as “the godhead,” that refract divine light as they descend into the corporeal world. This Kabbalah, sometimes known as theosophical Kabbalah, tracks divine light through these *sephirot* and uses ritual and contemplative techniques to move these *sephirot* in the proper positions to maximize the influx of divine light through them and into the world. This system is founded on the principle of theurgy, that is, that human action, in this case the performance of ritual commandments (*mitzvot*), has direct impact on the *sephirotic* world. Accompanying these acts are contemplative meditations, or *kavvanot*, that direct the divine flow as it filters downward through the *sephirotic* realm as a consequence of mandated ritual acts. These techniques also enable the Kabbalist to achieve an awareness of this divine flow as it filters through the cosmic realm.

Hitbodedut is perhaps the most complicated term and arguably the central term in Vital’s text. Its etymology in Hebrew comes from BDD, “to be alone.” The closest English equivalent might be “solitude.” In medieval Kabbalah, especially in the works of Isaac of Acre (late 13th/early 14th c.) who had a strong influence on Vital, the term is used as a condition for contemplation (see Idel 1988, 128–31). With the term *hishtavut* (equanimity), also common in Isaac of Acre’s writings, Vital employs two terms that Jewish mystics likely adopted from Sufism (see Fenton 1994, 1995).¹⁹ The term *hitbodedut* has other meanings in the Jewish mystical tradition. For example, in Bratslav Hasidism (beginning in early 19th-c. Ukraine), the term *hitbodedut* means something quite different. Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810) urged his followers to go out alone into the fields or forests and talk to God in the vernacular. This was not a particularly contemplative exercise and often resulted in gesticulating and the screaming cries of adepts as they emptied their insides through verbal catharsis. Habad Hasidism, a Hasidic group that

Category	Sephirot
Above-consciousness	1. Keter: Crown
Conscious Intellect	2. Hokhmah: Wisdom 3. Binah: Understanding (Da’at: Knowledge)
Conscious Emotions	Primary Emotions 4. Hesed: Kindness 5. Gevurah: Judgment 6. Tifereth: Beauty Secondary Emotions 7. Netsah: Eternity 8. Hod: Splendor 9. Yesod: Foundation 10. Malkhut: Kingship

Figure 5.2. Categories and Associations of the Ten *Sephirot*

emerged at about the same time, coined the term *hitbonenut* to imply a more contemplative state. This term comes from the root BNN, “to utilize the mind (*bina*) in contemplation,” or, as some translate it, “meditation.” Vital uses the term *hitbodedut* in its more medieval usage to imply both solitude as the condition and contemplation as the telos of the adept’s process toward mystical experience. *Hitbodedut* as contemplation thus uses the condition (to be alone) to describe the act (to contemplate).

Devekut is a much more common term, and thus more multivalent, and has attracted more attention among scholars (see, e.g., Scholem 1949–1950; Pachter 1984; Carmilly-Weinberger 2008). The term took on specific resonance in Safed in the sixteenth century when Vital was active. There is much debate as to what this term actually implies. Moshe Idel (1995, 86–89) suggests that it comes quite close to the foreign term *unio mystica*, an experience of unity with the divine. Vital’s use of the term in the *Shaarei Kedusha*, especially in the fourth part, seems closer to a notion of a symmetry whereby the adept aligns himself perfectly to receive the flow from above. It is a condition of receiving the Holy Spirit and thus the condition of prophecy.²⁰ He envisions this state not only as the apex of the religious quest but also as a positive biblical commandment, “And cleave to him” (Deut. 10:20). In part 3, Vital identifies *devekut* with prophecy quite explicitly. “The prophet cleaves (*miḏdabek*) to the Holy Name through the drawing down of prophecy and divine effluence to the lower realm.”²¹ One of the things distinctive about Vital’s fourth part is the merging of “letter combination” techniques and *devekut*, the experience of unity with the divine. This has precedent in Abraham Abulafia, but Vital’s explicit use of the term *devekut* as a consequence of the techniques deployed became popular in subsequent Kabbalah and later in Hasidism (see Idel 1995, 61).

Hishtavut, or equanimity, is a common medieval trope of ascetic pietism and one that Vital likely gleaned from his reading of Isaac of Acre and through Elijah da Vidas's *Reshit Hokhma*.²² The term applies to an ascetic exercise that erases any judgment between one thing and another. In the fourth part Vital cites a story in a quasi-Zen Buddhist dialogic exchange whereby a master questions an aspiring mystic as to what he thinks of the person who honors him and the person who denigrates him. The young man says, "I feel pleasure from the one who honors me and pain from the one who denigrates me. But I do not bear a grudge." The master sends him on his way saying, "As long as they are not equal in your eyes, until you feel no difference between being honored and being denigrated, you are not ready for your thoughts to be bound to the upper spheres when you enter contemplation." Equanimity is thus a state of selflessness where the mystic becomes a nonjudgmental vessel that receives everything equally. It is thus not an integral part of the mystical experience but an integral condition for its occurrence.

Ruah ha-kodesh (Holy Spirit) and *nevuah* (prophecy) are complicated terms in that they seem sometimes to be used interchangeably in the *Shaarei Kedusha*, but they do not mean the same thing, at least not in a formal sense. Simply stated, prophecy is a communication from God that enables one to step outside the linear time of history and thus know the future.²³ Prophetic proclamations have legal weight, and the rabbis even enable the prophets to temporarily annul a divine decree. Experiencing the Holy Spirit does not contain the same dispensation but also does not carry the same authoritative weight. The Holy Spirit does not become inaccessible after prophecy, and the rabbis and their spiritual progeny leave open the possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit even after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.²⁴ In the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, Vital writes, "After a person achieves this state of cleaving, he will achieve equanimity (*hishtavut*).²⁵ If he achieves equanimity, he can achieve contemplation. After achieving contemplation, he can merit the Holy Spirit, and from there he can achieve prophecy, meaning that he can know the future." Here prophecy appears as the stage following the Holy Spirit. Yet we also read, "This is why prophecy and the Holy Spirit are called slumber (*tirdama*), dream (*halom*), or vision (*hazon*)," without an explicit distinction between them. In the third part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, Vital remarks that prophecy and the Holy Spirit are both operational and necessary. "Prophecy and the Holy Spirit must be found in our world and easy to achieve. The difficulty is finding those who are fit for this."²⁶ Vital's explicit claim of proximity between the normative notion of receiving the Holy Spirit and the more precarious notion of the renewal of prophecy, all situated within technical methods of actualizing both, puts the *Shaarei Kedusha*, especially its fourth part, in a place between the theosophical Kabbalah from the *Zohar* to Luria and the ecstatic and prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia. As mentioned earlier, while we cannot know for certain, perhaps it was the desire to keep these two approaches separate that contributed to the decision not to publish the fourth part of Hayyim Vital's treatise.

Entering the Gates of Holiness

The *Shaarei Kedusha* (Gates of Holiness) by Hayyim Vital (1542–1620) was originally written in four parts (*halakim*), with each part consisting of various "gates" (*shearim*). These four parts

include twenty-five gates or sections in total. The division of Kabbalistic texts into separate parts is not uncommon, especially in the Lurianic school. In *Shaarei Kedusha* each gate, or *sha'ar*, serves to build the case toward Vital's understanding of applied Kabbalah. The historical grounding in the first three parts is necessary because Vital is well aware that his applied techniques in part 4 are not common and would likely be open to criticism. It should also be noted that these four parts may not have been written as they are printed but are, rather, at least in part the work of the editor of the manuscripts.

The first three parts of the *Shaarei Kedusha* cover ground common in other pietistic texts of the period. The first part discusses the nature of human sin and explains the different levels of righteousness that lead one to the status of the *zaddik* (righteous one) or *hasid* (pious one). The second part is devoted to the question of punishment for transgressions and the rewards of fulfilling the precepts of the Torah. The third part is concerned primarily with prophecy, the ways to achieve it, its various levels, and the experience of communion with God (*devekut*) and *ruah ha-kodesh* (the Holy Spirit).

The history of the unpublished fourth part of Hayyim Vital's *Shaarei Kedusha* is somewhat of an anomaly in the Jewish textual tradition. We have many cases where publishers chose not to print texts because their authors were deemed by some authorities as suspect, or, in other cases, where the texts were anonymous and thus the veracity and orthodoxy of the text could not be fully verified. In this case, we have a text that was accepted as written not only by a reputable Kabbalist but one of the most prolific and well-regarded Kabbalists in one of the most explosive periods of Kabbalistic creativity.²⁷ Moreover, this text did not stand alone but was the concluding part of a larger text, the *Shaarei Kedusha*, that has been reprinted many times since its initial printing in Constantinople in 1644. It remains a popular Kabbalistic text even for those not literate in the Kabbalistic tradition and has been mentioned approvingly by the greatest traditional and ultra-traditional minds in Jewish modernity.

All of this raises the following questions: Why did the printers of the *Shaarei Kedusha* choose not to print this fourth part, and why have subsequent printers until the 1980s continued to exclude this part from printings of the *Shaarei Kedusha*? Such questions did not go unanswered in various printers' introductions. Apparently, even before its first printing, Abraham ben-Asher, the copier of Vital's manuscript in Egypt, wanted to conceal this final part.²⁸ In the editor's introduction to the first edition we read, "This fourth part will not be transcribed nor printed because its contents exclusively contain divine names, divine letter permutations, and secrets that make it inappropriate to be published."²⁹ In addition, and this may be a more compelling reason not to publish this part, the editor mentions that this part relies on the "letter Kabbalah" (or, as Moshe Idel prefers, the "ecstatic Kabbalah") of Abraham Abulafia. By the sixteenth century Abulafia's Kabbalah had suffered such harsh criticism even in Kabbalistic circles that it was never published. Moshe Idel has shown, however, that even as Kabbalists such as Moshe Cordovero had ostensibly completely absorbed the theosophical Kabbalah based on the *Zohar*, elements of Abulafian Kabbalah were embedded in his work.³⁰ Thus we can see that Abulafia's work was being read in manuscript. Being a student of Cordovero, Vital was surely exposed to this material. What distinguishes the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, however, is the explicit way in which Abulafian techniques are developed.

What any reader of the following translation will see is that this text as published is not exclusively divine names and letter permutations, and mention of Abulafia is quite minimal,

Part I	Part III
1. Explanation of the fault that was caused by transgression of the <i>mitzvot</i> (1)	1. On the nature of the worlds, including a brief introduction for understanding the nature of prophecy (15)
2. Explanation of continuous fault due to improper conduct (2)	2. On the nature of humanity (16)
3. Explanation of the virtues of the righteous and of the pious. Teaches how to obtain them (3)	3. On the prophecy impellers (17)
4. Explanation of the details of the virtue of the righteous one (<i>tzadik</i>) (4)	4. On the prophecy stipulations (18)
5. Explanation of Hasidic virtue and how it will always be before your eyes (5)	5. On prophecy quality and concerns (19)
6. Summary of the previous gates and explanation how the Hasid should conduct his life in order to prevent his downfall (6)	6. On the prophecy levels (20)
Part II	7. A guide to the Holy Spirit in our times (21)
1. Reproofs (7)	8. Explanation concerning the sanctification in our time (22)
2. Reproofs of discipline of our sages of blessed memory (8)	Part IV
3. Untitled (9)	1. Necessary conditions for divine apprehension (23)
4. The punishment for bad character traits and the reward for good character traits (10)	2. Practical matters of divine apprehension (24)
5. The punishment for those who possess forbidden character traits (11)	3. Practical matters (contemplative techniques) (25)
6. The punishments for those who transgress the negative <i>mitzvot</i> (12)	
7. On the observance of the positive <i>mitzvot</i> and of good conduct (13)	
8. The gate of repentance, which is divided into three parts (14)	

Figure 5.3. Sections of the Received *Shaarei Kedusha*

although admittedly his influence may exist throughout. In fact, explicit Abulafian material only fills a small section of the text. I decided not to include this section (constituting about six printed pages) because its very nature makes it difficult if not impossible to convey in another language (see, e.g., Fine 1982).

What does flow more systemically in this text is the question of prophecy and the aspiration to attain prophecy through various contemplative techniques that include fasting, breathing, and the visualization of permutations of Hebrew letters. While prophecy as a formal category ended in Ancient Israel with the return of the exiles in fifth century BCE and the rabbinic tradition limits prophecy to the land of Israel (with the exception of Ezekiel who prophesied outside Erez Israel), Jewish mystics have continuously, and subtly, drawn a connection between mystical experience and prophecy (see, e.g., Fine 1982).³¹ Vital is quite explicit in the third part of *Shaarei Kedusha* about the possibility for, and even necessity of, prophecy in his time, but it is only in the fourth part that he presents contemplative techniques of how to attain prophecy.³² This suggests that the editors were less concerned with theoretical discussions regarding the renewal of prophecy, discussions that exist intermittently throughout Kabbalistic literature, especially after the Spanish expulsion in 1492, than with practical and technical discussions about how to achieve it. While we may never know for sure what Vital had in mind and what was in the minds of the printers who refused to print this fourth part (regardless of what they say), we can assume that it was read as somehow more problematic than similar discussions by Kabbalists from Isaac of Acre in the thirteenth century to Judah Albotini (1453–1519) in the fifteenth century and then Moses Cordovero in the sixteenth century.³³ In addition, Vital's reputation as a preeminent Kabbalist of this period was not tarnished by this text.

As printed, the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* is made up of three basic sections: (1) "necessary conditions for divine apprehension," (2) "practical matters of divine apprehension," and (3) "practical matters (contemplative techniques)." The translation that follows only includes parts 1 and 2. Part 1 consists of two printed pages; part 2 consists of eighteen printed pages; and part 3 consists of nine printed pages.³⁴ As Avishai Bar-Asher has shown, making assumptions about the text as a whole is problematic in that these three parts are likely three (or more) different "texts" that were written by Vital (some may have been changed by his son and grandson, both editors of his work). Bar-Asher divides the texts into two distinct textual layers: (1) preparations and practical techniques for achieving the Holy Spirit and (2) a collection of earlier Kabbalistic texts on human apprehension of the divine.³⁵ For example, the collection of earlier Kabbalistic material on acquiring the Holy Spirit and prophecy may have been written much earlier, consisting of material that Vital collected about contemplation as he was making his way through the Kabbalistic corpus (see Bar-Asher 2012). He may not have intended this to be a preface to his Abulafian techniques that may have been written much later. In and of itself, section 2 should not have been problematic for any Kabbalistic editor as it collects and collates a series of canonical Kabbalistic texts on the theme of apprehending the divine and attaining prophecy. Section 1 speaks of the necessary prerequisites of the contemplative life, in many cases restating what was stated in part 3 of the *Shaarei Kedusha* and any number of other canonical Kabbalistic texts. Hence, however the text was constructed, in whatever order, and in whatever time frame, it would appear that the choice not to print the fourth part was due to the inclusion of section 3 on techniques used by the contemplative to cultivate and foster prophecy. While other Kabbalists apart from Abulafia write about prophecy, they mostly do so in general and generic terms. This is true of Vital's teachers Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. It is worth noting that before meeting Luria, Vital had dabbled in alchemy and other exercises that came close to what is known as practical Kabbalah (*kabbalah ma'asit*) (see Boss 1994). He later turned against all practical Kabbalah, and in the *Shaarei Kedusha* and many other places he spoke vociferously against it.³⁶

While we cannot know for sure, given Vital's predilection for experimentation and his messianic ambitions, it is indeed plausible that he collected a series of earlier texts on contemplation and the aspiration for prophecy to use for some practical contemplative purpose. Hence the manuscripts that place the collection of texts before the technical section make more sense than the manuscripts that place the technical section first. We also know from his diary that Vital considered himself to be a unique, even messianic, soul, and thus the reinstitution of prophecy would not be far from view.³⁷

The practice of collating earlier sources was well known to Vital. Vital's family was from Italy, and he was intimately familiar with Italian Kabbalah. Moshe Idel describes what he calls "mosaic kabbalists"—namely, those combining the ideas of several kabbalistic schools. . . . They are more concerned with absorbing, digesting, arranging, and re-arranging the pertinent sources in larger literary creations . . ." (Idel 2011a, 110). Section 2 appears to take this form, although, again, we cannot know Vital's intent in composing it. The fact that some of the texts that he collects speak approvingly of Abulafia (including his teacher Cordovero), and that he also cites Judah Hayyat's overt critique of Abulafia, suggests Abulafia is in his sights.³⁸ One of the striking things about the *Shaarei Kedusha* is how much Vital remained in some way a student of Moses Cordovero. Cordovero's mention and, more importantly here, his possible application of Abulafian techniques may be the shadow under which the *Shaarei Kedusha* was written (Idel 1988a, 138).³⁹

Thus the text as we have it here, that is, classic preparatory conditions for contemplation to receive the Holy Spirit, earlier justifications of contemplation as a means to receive the Holy Spirit, and then practical meditative techniques to receive the Holy Spirit, makes perfect sense. Whether or not this was Vital's intent we do not know, but it seems to have been the intent of the transcriber of the manuscript that was used for the Ahavat Shalom edition.

The text as printed thus serves simultaneously as a justification for, and guide to, prophecy. Moshe Idel quite explicitly claims, "According to the author [Vital] the fourth and final stage of the process of purification, whose ultimate purpose is the attainment of prophecy, includes seclusion in a special house" (Idel 1988b, 135). Combining preparations for contemplation (which were considered normative by Kabbalists of his time),⁴⁰ justification for this exercise, and then techniques to achieve it, provides the reader with an abbreviated version of pious directives and support for the "orthodoxy" of such an endeavor and finally a technical guide for the aspiring contemplative. Again, we cannot determine if this was Vital's intent because the text as printed was not organized by him. However, it does appear that he was attempting (whether in this text specifically or more generally) to bring together the mystical piety he learned from his teachers, utilizing a mosaic method common in earlier Italian Kabbalah with an Abulafian approach toward achieving prophecy. He may have learned this from Cordovero. It is clear from what we know of Vital's youth that he was not exclusively interested in metaphysics or even theurgy. However, once he became a disciple of Isaac Luria around 1571, much of his work focused on the complex theurgic and cosmological system that Luria espoused.

The first section of part 4 of the *Shaarei Kedusha* is very short and introduces the reader to the ethical conditions necessary to achieve a mystical or prophetic experience through a series of citations from medieval mystics (e.g., Moshe Nahmanides, Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Hasidim* [Book of the Pious] by Rabbi Judah the Pious, and the anonymous *Brit Menuha* [Covenant of Composure]). Traits such as humility, equanimity, and the need to constantly direct one's thoughts to God are mentioned and briefly discussed.

The second section of part 4 is a more practical guide to contemplation. It examines in detail the postures and intention of prayer and the visualization of separating oneself from one's body. Much of it is devoted to exercises to control one's thoughts. This is also done through citation of earlier sources, but here Vital finds his voice and elaborates on these matters. However, unlike contemplative guides in other traditions, we still do not have a detailed practical guide of implementation. These matters are written about in general terms; only basic rubrics are discussed. Clearly, though, the ethical conditions for contemplation in section 1 now lead to more internal matters between the adept and his relationship to his own body and the spiritual ascent.

The third and final section of part 4 of the *Shaarei Kedusha* opens with a citation from Abulafia and is focused more on the techniques of letter mysticism including letter permutation meditation, the recitation of angelic names, and the use of numerology to link disparate words for the purposes of *yihud* or *zeruf oriot* (unifications of letters). This type of Kabbalah specifically involves combining the twenty-two letters (consonants) of the Hebrew alphabet (remember that vowels are not written) in various ways, especially, in the case of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, into the seventy-two names of God. The notion of manipulating letters, often by rearranging them in different combinations, either to spell out different words, puns, or angelic names, is a common practice in medieval Kabbalah that was used extensively by Abulafia. It also exists in the Lurianic school, especially in the later recensions of the Sharabi school in eighteenth-century Palestine.

One of the striking lacunae in the *Shaarei Kedusha* more generally and the fourth part in particular is that overt reference to Isaac Luria is almost entirely absent. After Luria's death in 1572, Vital came to be the most prolific and, according to him, the only legitimate representative of Luria's teachings.⁴¹ It could be, as some claim, that some or even much of the *Shaarei Kedusha* was initially written before Vital met Luria around 1570. However, Vital lived for decades after

א (A)	ל (L)
ב/ב (B/V)	מ (M)
ג (G)	נ (N)
ד (D)	ס (S)
ה (H)	ע (')
ו (V)	פ/פ (P/F)
ז (Z)	צ (TZ)
ח (CH)	ק (Q)
ט (T)	ר (R)
י (Y)	ש (SH)
כ/כ (K/KH)	ת (T)

Figure 5.4. Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet

Luria's death in 1572 and continued working on various projects.⁴² Why, then, did he not integrate Luria's approach into what would become one of Vital's most widely read texts? We have very little information regarding Luria's exposure to or opinion of Abulafia. We must remember that Luria spent all but the last eighteen months of his adult life in Egypt. He briefly studied with Cordovero, who was quite old when Luria arrived in Safed, before going off on his own, and he did know David Ibn Zamra in Egypt, who mentioned Abulafia numerous times in his work.⁴³ Yet even if we accept the fact that Abulafia was indeed a part of the Kabbalistic world of Safed in the mid-sixteenth century, Luria's short stay there may suggest that he was not exposed to Abulafia in any significant way and, even if he was, his teachings as recorded by his many disciples show almost no influence of Abulafia whatsoever.⁴⁴

Lurianic Contemplative Practice in Later Jewish Kabbalah

The combination of adaptations of Lurianic Kabbalah in Italy, among Sabbateans in southern and Eastern Europe, Lithuanian Jewish mystics in the circle of the Gaon of Vilna (Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman; 1720–1797), and the rise of Hasidism resulted in Lurianic Kabbalah as the dominant, almost exclusive, school of Kabbalah in modernity. While medieval Kabbalists were still studied and scholars have shown the evidence of Abulafia's and Cordovero's systems in later Kabbalah, much of this was refracted through the Lurianic system. Even in the study of the *Zohar*, Lurianic commentaries on the *Zohar* dominated later readings of the text in traditional circles. Almost all contemporary academies of Kabbalah in Israel today are exclusively based on the Lurianic system with other works coming to compliment, not contest, Lurianic dominance (Garb 2012). In scholarly circles, of course, things are quite different, and, somewhat surprisingly, Lurianic Kabbalah has not been a central focus of study. While Gershom Scholem argued in his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* that Lurianic Kabbalah was of central importance in terms of what he described was its metaphysical construct of history as divine rupture and repair, and while he acknowledged its dominance in traditional circles during his lifetime, he did not devote a major study to Lurianic Kabbalah.

In any case, the dominance of Lurianic Kabbalah coupled with its inordinate complexity made texts such as the *Shaarei Kedusha* extremely popular. This is because the *Shaarei Kedusha* presents the Lurianic system in broad strokes without delving into the details that one finds in Vital's other works, such as the *Etz Hayyim* (Tree of Life) and *Shemoneh Shearim* (Eight Gates). It was especially popular with Hasidim whose focus was by and large more devotional than scholastic.

The recently published fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* begins with an extensive and substantive editor's introduction. This introduction by Neranel Safrin, a senior member and editor at Yaakov Moshe Hillel's Ahavat Shalom Yeshiva in Jerusalem, contains his justification for printing this text after it remained in manuscript for centuries and speaks to the larger question of Abulafia's influence in contemporary Kabbalah, both in traditional and nontraditional circles that may have inspired bringing this text to light.⁴⁵ The choice to print this fourth part and Safrin's justification is worth examining briefly. To begin, Yaakov Moshe Hillel, the yeshiva dean (*rosh yeshiva*) at Ahavat Shalom Yeshiva, has written openly against the publication of Abulafia's works (see Meir 2007, 241n522). However, elsewhere he offers a common justification for the publication of Kabbalah

that we are living in the "footsteps of the Messiah" and the study of Kabbalah will provide the necessary *tikkun* (rectification) to move that process along.⁴⁶

The editor's introduction begins with a lengthy quotation from Moses Maimonides's (1134–1204) *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed). This makes sense for two reasons. First, because Maimonides is considered such a canonical figure, the placement of this problematic text in a Maimonidean frame immediately gives it credibility. Second, Abulafia was a close and devoted reader of Maimonides, even devoting numerous studies to interpret Maimonides in a Kabbalistic fashion (Luria almost ignores Maimonides).⁴⁷ The citation from Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* III 52:53 is a classic text for Kabbalists since Maimonides speaks of contemplation on the divine name as a condition for being under the influence of divine providence. We read,

If a person turns his mind and perceives the divine in its true ways, and is joyous in which he achieves, it is impossible for that person to succumb to the evils of the world, for he is with the Name and the Name is with him. But when his mind turns from the Name, he becomes separated from it, and the Name becomes separated from him. In that instant, all the evils of the world could potentially find him.

While it is unlikely that Maimonides meant what Kabbalists such as Abulafia interpreted him to mean, this introduces a quasi-Abulafian approach to the contemporary reader in a way that could be easily digested. It is somewhat ironic that Luria had little use for Maimonides, almost never citing him, and Vital was not a particular devotee of Maimonides either, specifically his philosophical treatise *Guide for the Perplexed*. Safrin then cleverly filters this approach through a principle of Moshe Isserles, the sixteenth-century Polish legalist, in his gloss to the canonical *Shulhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) followed by a reference to Lurianic Kabbalah that is almost entirely missing from this treatise. Only then does he mention Vital's fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, thus setting it solidly within the ideational and legal framework of normative Judaism.

The most revealing part of this introduction, however, is the editor's justification for publishing this previously unpublished text now. Acknowledging that Abraham Ben-Asher, the transcriber of the *Shaarei Kedusha*, explicitly excluded this fourth part from his manuscript, Safrin remarks that this decision was made before the publication of the Lurianic corpus, much of which contains precisely the letter combinations (*zerufot*) that Ben-Asher feared. Regarding mention of Abulafia, Safrin cites the well-known denigration of Abulafia and his writings, yet he also remarks on how some of these same individuals make reference to similar Kabbalistic ideas. The denigration of Kabbalah accompanied by the reference to Kabbalah is not uncommon. We see similar instances of this in the works of the Italian rabbis Elijah del Medigo (1458–1493) and Leon Modena (1571–1648), both of whom criticize Kabbalah while obviously being quite knowledgeable about its ideas and even use Kabbalah in various ways in their work.⁴⁸ By equivocating the critique of Abulafia and suggesting that in our time, that is, after the proliferation of the Lurianic corpus that is replete with the very dimensions of Kabbalah that Abraham ben-Asher cites as the reason not to transcribe the fourth part, Safrin accomplishes two distinct but related things. First, he contextualizes and thus diffuses the prohibition against publishing the text. Second, he views the text as part of the Lurianic lineage, which, as any reader can see, cannot be justified in the text itself. By linking Abulafia's "letter combination" with Lurianic contemplative techniques (*kavvanot*),

the editor essentially situates this text as a legitimate companion to the contemporary study of Kabbalah.

The context of this publication, as well as the editor's justification to publish it, is important. What remains unanswered in Safrin's introduction is why while publishing the Lurianic corpus began slowly in the eighteenth century and really took off in the later decades of the nineteenth century, this fourth part remained unpublished until the 1980s! Here Zeev Gries's comment is significant:

In those years [the 1970s until today] the socialistic, profane nature of the social and cultural life of the Jewish state was challenged by the rise of traditional sentiments of many young and adult Jews. . . . Since then, the ongoing process of secularization of Jewish life was and is coupled with a growing interest in traditional Jewish literature. (Gries 2008, 114)

The choice to publish this text now seems part of a larger shift in printing Kabbalistic literature in the later decades of the twentieth century, in large part due to the changing nature of ultra-Orthodox society influenced by, among other things, a renewed interest in the Jewish mystical tradition, both in Israel and the Diaspora; the increased influence of Mizrahi tradition where Kabbalah was almost always normative; as well as a more independent-minded readership no longer as tightly bound to older models of authority. Among other things, this new movement toward what I would call a kind of "anarchic traditionalism"⁴⁹ all but broke the spell of the decree against Abulafian Kabbalah, thus diffusing any remaining resistance to the printing of the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*.⁵⁰

The interest in meditation that largely came to Israel from the American counterculture and young Israelis' interest in Asian religions as a result of post-army travel created prime conditions for the introduction of Abulafian Kabbalah in general and contemplative Kabbalah in particular. Of particular interest is the understudied influence of the American rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (1934–1983), whose books such as *Meditation and the Bible* (1978) and *Meditation and Kabbalah* (1982) freely use Abulafian techniques.⁵¹ While Yaakov Moshe Hillel remained opposed to the publication of Abulafia's writings and was openly opposed to noninitiates studying Kabbalah more generally, he sanctioned the publication of the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha*. Safrin's introduction addresses this apparent discrepancy by setting this part solidly within the normative Lurianic trajectory.

Translating the Untranslatable: A Note on Kabbalistic Translation

I briefly discussed the importance of Hebrew and language in Kabbalah earlier in this chapter. Hebrew lends itself to word play because all the letters in Hebrew are consonants enabling variant vocalizations to change a word's meaning or make two distinct words appear connected. Given that almost all Kabbalistic texts are written in Hebrew, even as the *lingua franca* of most of its authors was not, in many cases word play and linguistic allusions are built into the very fabric of the texts, even when the author is explaining a particular Kabbalistic idea. This poses serious challenges to the translator, who must somehow lift the language of the text from its embedded place in the ambiguity of Hebrew word play. Moreover, since many of the contemplative techniques involve

the manipulation and visualization of Hebrew letters, translating these techniques can be difficult and, without knowledge of the language, comprehending much less performing these techniques is a challenge, if not an impossibility.

Yet given all these caveats, in some way the modern study of Kabbalah began with translation. In 1923 the young Gershom Scholem completed *Das Buch Bahir*, his doctoral dissertation from the University of Munich, which included an annotated German translation and commentary of the early Kabbalistic treatise *Sefer Bahir*.⁵² Over the course of the twentieth century, many translations of Kabbalah followed. The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the first major critical translation of the *Zohar* when Daniel Matt published the first volume of the projected twelve-volume *The Pritzker Zohar* in 2004. I mention this only because there has been a robust debate among scholars of Kabbalah if this esoteric wisdom founded so deeply on language, specifically the Hebrew language, can be translated into another language without losing the blood (i.e., the language) that flows through its veins. Kabbalah is certainly not the only metaphysical and experiential wisdom that is tied deeply to the language in which it is expressed, but it surely is one of them.⁵³ And thus it is curious that the academic study of this ancient lore begins with . . . a translation. It is thus appropriate to discuss my translation of a sixteenth-century Kabbalistic text on contemplation by briefly reflecting on the question: What precisely does a translator do when he or she translates an esoteric text, a text whose very form of communication is to conceal precisely what it reveals? The sixteenth-century Kabbalist Isaac Luria put it succinctly when he defined his role as a teacher as "revealing one handbreadth and concealing a thousand."⁵⁴

The two epigraphs that introduce this chapter gesture toward two approaches to the question of translation by the national Israeli poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) and the scholar of Kabbalah Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), both of whom thought deeply about the Hebrew language and its relationship to the tradition that it articulates.⁵⁵ Both comments reflect Kabbalistic images of the erotic nature of language and the desire of one who utters it. And both were translators, in the formal and informal sense of the word.⁵⁶ Both lamented the secularization of the holy tongue yet recognized its inevitability. For Scholem, the secularization process *had* to fail. He writes,

One believes that language has been secularized, that its apocalyptic thorn has been pulled out. But that is surely not true. The secularization of language is only a *façon de parler*, a ready-made phrase. It is impossible to empty out words filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of language itself.⁵⁷

Bialik viewed language itself as a failure, not a failure to recognize the experience of divine unity but, quite the opposite, the failure to recognize the true reality of Chaos (Bialik uses the Hebrew term *blimah* that refers to nonsubstance, lit., without whatness). The secularization of language is a tragedy because it ties language so tightly to the everyday world that it hides that truth of humanity (see Bialik 2000, 89–94). Not unlike Nietzsche, Bialik suggests that we use language to escape the truth. As Azzan Yadin writes, "The ontological foundations of Bialik's critique of language have now been laid bare. Ultimate reality is Chaos, while the common language of generalization and abstractions enveloped man [*sic*] in a false sense of security and stability, distracting him from this difficult truth" (Yadin 2001, 195).

However, the epigraph from Bialik, echoing the Midrashic tradition that also informed the Kabbalists, suggests that language is a kiss, perhaps between the speaker and the one spoken to. Perhaps between the speaker and the language itself. Translation dampens the fire of erotic desire as a veil separates flesh from flesh, Word from flesh, leaving the lovers—the language and the speaker, the speaker and the listener—in a state of perennial unconsummation. Translation for Bialik is to be close, to almost touch, and yet never taste the flesh of the other, of the language. For Bialik, translation is a compromise of that which is already a compromise. Bialik's pessimism regarding language is countered by what he thinks brings language to life by destabilizing it: poetry. For "the masters of poetry . . . the profane becomes sacred, and the sacred profane" (2000, 89). For both Scholem and Bialik, in different ways, the best use of language is to free it from the rigidity of objects and generalization, to free language from simply describing the world. For Bialik, this is through poetry. For Scholem, this is exemplified in Kabbalah, the one use of language that gets at its very core: names. He cites approvingly the thirteenth-century rabbinic leader and Kabbalist Moses Nahmanides when he introduces his commentary to Genesis by claiming that the entire Torah—narrative, law, history—is simply one continuous recitation of "names of God." For Scholem, Kabbalah is the great resister of the secularization of language.⁵⁸

Scholem's letter cited in the epigraph to this chapter was written to Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), who was in the midst of a massive translation project of the Hebrew Bible (into German) with Martin Buber (1878–1965), a project that sought to revolutionize not only the German but also the original Hebrew text.⁵⁹ Scholem's quotation suggests translation is an act of penetration, to enter the heart of another language, perhaps to dwell there, if only for a moment.⁶⁰ But all this comes at a price. In another letter to Rosenzweig from late 1926 Scholem writes about the danger of the modernization of Hebrew, itself a form of translation. He writes, "It is absolutely impossible to empty out words which filled to bursting, unless one does so at the expense of the language itself!"⁶¹ Nevertheless, somehow he also wrote that translation is a kind of miracle, which can "enter into the heart of the sacred order from which it springs." Perhaps for Scholem it is only because this "miracle" is possible that we do it at all. And even the "miracle" is not without a price. All miracles, perhaps, have a price. One of the grave dangers of language for Scholem, perhaps a product of its secularization, is when language becomes too familiar. The *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) of language in some way protects its sacrality. It is not insignificant that even when Scholem mastered the New Hebrew of Palestine and then Israel he continued to write in other languages (German and English) throughout his life. Galili Shahar makes the following suggestion worth considering: "Scholem's 'real language,' one can argue, lies in the gap between the languages; the sources of his speech is the difference, the tension, the unfamiliarity of German and Hebrew" (2008, 307). In his lamentation about the secularization and popularization of the New Hebrew, Scholem writes, "Our children no longer have another language, and it is only too true to say that they, and they alone, will pay for the encounter which we have initiated without asking, without even asking ourselves." Monolingualism defuses the tension and, in doing so, undermines the *Unheimlichkeit* necessary for the sacred. Perhaps this "gap between the languages" is precisely where the translator resides.⁶²

It would seem that of all texts to translate, mystical texts would be the most difficult because (1) they are often the most intimately tied to language; and (2) because mystics are engaged in saying the unsayable in their original language (see, e.g., Sells 1994). How much more so given

the distance, or veil, created by translation? In his recent collection of translations of Kabbalistic poetry, Peter Cole suggests the following:

Another way of putting this is that mysticism—and, *curiously, translation*—tries to say what it seems can't quite be said, what is hardest to say, or what some feel shouldn't be said. By surrounding the unsayable with techniques of speech or silence, the mystical work seeks to construct allegories of inwardness and understanding, to catch at least a reflection of that elusive essence of experience and so to tell us what it might mean to be more profoundly awake to our loves and all they ride on. (2012, xviii; italics added)

Cole suggests symmetry between mystical texts and translation worth considering. What would it mean to translate a text that acknowledges its failure to adequately express its own meaning, or, put otherwise, a text that acknowledges the unbridgeable distance between experience and expression? In this sense, the text *itself* is a translation, and thus a translation of it would not be blasphemous but only continuing what the text sets out to do. Perhaps for the Kabbalists, translation, given all its inadequacies, *is* tradition (the term Kabbalah literally means "to receive" or, more colloquially, "tradition").

In order to avoid being accused of reifying mystical texts, what Cole suggests here is arguably true of all texts. In contrast to Bialik's veil, I think translation has its own Eros; rather than demystifying the kiss, it adds another layer of flesh, or metaphor, onto the kiss. Here Martin Kavka's recent essay on translation says it well:

We do not decide to translate. We find ourselves translating simply because we are living among varied and varying communities. We find ourselves translating in different ways at different times because the others among whom we live change. The aim of translation therefore cannot be some permanent mapping of concepts onto one another. The meaning of those concepts will change over time, so translation will never exhaust itself. (2012, 196)

The notion that translation is a matter of living in the world, many worlds, and not an act of our choosing, captures what I have done in the following translation. In the act of translation I find myself fluctuating between rendering and creating, choosing and reacting, agonizing and breathing. The former (rendering, choosing, agonizing) are acts of volition, the latter (creating, reacting, breathing) I do even against my will. I find myself in the "gap between the languages," making one familiar yet in the act of translating, recognizing (and experiencing) the *Unheimlichkeit* of both (to me, and to each other). The translator must ponder a word in the original and, in doing so, must consider what the word represents. This can, borrowing Scholem's volcanic metaphor, enable a word's multiple meanings to erupt to the surface.⁶³ The translator must make a choice, but that choice does not necessarily repress the eruption as much as give it foreign form, protecting its unfamiliarity, even as it may veil its multifarious nuances.

Those of us who translate in the formal sense know the difference between reading, even closely, and translating. The former can be a caress while the latter is, as Scholem intimated, an

act of penetration, "leading into the heart of the sacred order from which it springs." But so as not to get overly heard about doing what we do not choose, Kavka tells us more.

This account of translation allows us . . . both to affirm a boundary between cultures and at the same time acknowledge that the boundary is contingent. It allows for translation—cultures are neither incommensurable (making translation impossible) nor identical (making it unnecessary)—and at the same time it acknowledges that at various historical moments, the ways in which we want to translate might change. (2012, 204)

And so the wind in the sails of any rigid notion of the sacred is mitigated by the notion that the text and tradition itself are an exercise in translation. Following Bialik, one could argue that translation is compromise as language is compromise. Kavka argues translation is freedom.⁶⁴ It not only frees the translator; it liberates the text being translated from the confines of incommensurability. It enables a reader to miraculously penetrate the sacred order of the text, not necessarily to understand it on its own terms (even reading it in the original language will not do that) but to experience something of its fleshy core. In addition, translation takes a text across a border; it enables it to enter our habitus, a world that is changing. There is an Eros and intimacy in reading a text in the language in which it was written. But Eros and intimacy are not identical. Translation is an intimate, even penetrating, act. The translated text may lose that intimacy, but it does not necessarily lose an erotic quality; it becomes an Eros of unfamiliarity. Its very existence is, as Scholem states, miraculous, not in its reproducing the original (that would not be "miraculous"; it would be impossible or, even, undesirable) but in opening the text to change, change in the way that all texts change when they are read anew.

Is translation for Bialik and Scholem more like the secularized New Hebrew spoken in the *shuk* (marketplace) or the Hebrew of the poet or Kabbalist? It is likely something in-between, in the "gap of the languages" where familiarity (the secular) and the unfamiliar (the sacred) meet, and clash, and in their clashing coexists their intimate entwining.

As a final note, it is worth asking how much the publication of the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* has influenced contemporary forms of Jewish meditation. While this is a subject worth a separate study, my inclination is to suggest that it has not had much of an impact. The reasons lie perhaps in the ideational worldview of the text, a worldview that is wed to a Neoplatonic division of body and soul, ascetic practices and strict adherence to the law that does not conform to the New Age context of much of contemporary Jewish meditation (Garb 2012). Moreover, this work only appeared in a literal translation in 2006 even though it was referred to in earlier studies in Jewish meditation. The practice of Kabbalistic meditation today among those outside the small circles of adepts who may engage in such practices in secret is primarily an amalgam of Buddhist-influenced practices adopting Jewish models and motifs. Here some Abulafian techniques appear in truncated fashion to conform to body movement, visualization, and breathing techniques that practitioners glean from Buddhism and Hinduism as presented to a Western audience. This is not to say that Kabbalistic texts, the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* being an important exemplar, cannot provide a deeper and more nuanced variation on contemporary Jewish meditation. I think they can. In fact, it is my hope that, for those interested

in this practice from both scholarly and applied perspectives, this introduction and annotated translation of the fourth part will provide a window into exploring the sources, context, and applied method of Vital in regard to the contemplative life.

Notes

1. See Jerusalem Talmud Rosh Ha-Shana 2:1, 58b.
2. For a short biographical sketch, see Scholem 1974, 401–4. For more extensive works on his Kabbalistic doctrines, see Ben-Shlomo 1965 and Sack 1995.
3. Vital's family was from Calabria, Italy. It is unclear if Vital was born in Italy and, if so, when he came to Safed as a young child.
4. On ritual innovation of Safadean Kabbalah, see Scholem 1965, 118–57.
5. For two helpful biographical sketches of Vital, see Scholem 1974, 443–48 and Faierstein 1999, 3–31.
6. There are numerous places where Vital elaborates on his relationship to Luria. For one extensive discussion, see Vital's *Sha'ar Ha-Gilgulim* (Gate of Reincarnation) (Jerusalem, 1988), 39.
7. On Luria, see Fine 2003; Magid 2008.
8. For an English translation of this text, see Faierstein 1999.
9. *Sefer Hiziyanot*, 5.19; cf. Faierstein 1999, 9.
10. Damascus was the largest Jewish community and a large commercial center in closest proximity to Safed. Many Jews from Safed immigrated to Damascus after the demise of the Jewish community in Safed in the late sixteenth century resulting from various plagues that decimated the community there.
11. On Scholem's theory, see his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1961), 244–86. On Moshe Idel's critique, see Idel 1993, 1998, 154–82.
12. See, for example, Vital's *Sha'ar Gilgulim* (1988), 134–36.
13. On Abulafia's *unio mystica* and law, see Moshe Idel's "Abraham Abulafia and *Unio Mystica*" in Idel 1988, 1–32.
14. Kabbalah literally means "to receive" and is sometimes used as a euphemism for "tradition." In the High Middle Ages, the term Kabbalah came to refer to a genre of literature encompassing Jewish mysticism. This literature explored metaphysical, pietistic, and ritual forms of Jewish mystical practice. Kabbalistic circles consisted of esoteric and often elitist communities that included specific lineages and schools expounding specific teachings and practices. In the Renaissance and early modernity, Kabbalah was also adopted by some Christian mystics to support Christian doctrines. Today Kabbalah continues to function in many Jewish communities, both traditional and progressive. On the history of Jewish Kabbalah, see Scholem 1961, 1962, 1974; Blumenthal 1982; Dan and Kiener 1986; Idel 1988b, 1990b; Hallamish 1999; Giller 2011.
15. On mystical techniques in early Kabbalah, see Idel 1990b, 74–111.
16. For a detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between Abulafia's letter mysticism and the mysticism of the *sephiroth* in Zoharic Kabbalah, see Wolfson 2000a, 94–185.
17. Abulafia's corpus is being published in Jerusalem by Amnon Gross. To date more than twenty volumes have appeared.
18. On some contemporary discussion of Jewish meditation, see Kaplan 1982, 1995; Verman 1996; Giller 2011, 145–54.
19. On *hitbodedut* as a condition, see *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem*, 3:8, 127.
20. As stated by Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, "Later it [*devekut*] became a very important tool in Hasidic circles. With the mutation and permutation of the Hebrew letters it became possible to create and

rebuild a connection to God, the 'unio mystica.' . . . They tried many ways. Did they succeed? One positive result is that *devekut* led to prophecy" (2008, 18).

21. *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem*, 3:2, 106.

22. On the term in Isaac of Acre, see Fishbane 2009, 253–59.

23. The term has a much more complex meaning in philosophical and mystical literature. See, e.g., Kreisel 2001; Idel 2009.

24. The concept of the Holy Spirit in Christianity is drawn from this classical Jewish notion. See Gunkel 1979. The connection between the Holy Spirit in Christianity and *ruah ha-kodesh* is made explicit in the Jewish convert to Christianity, Immanuel Frommann (d. 1735) in his commentary to Luke (written in Hebrew). See Wolfson 2011.

25. The notion of equanimity is a central tenet of Sufi mysticism that was an important part of Isaac of Acco's work. Moshe Idel notes that aside from other similarities between Abulafian Kabbalah and Sufi mystics, neither Abulafia nor the anonymous medieval Kabbalistic work written sometime at the end of the thirteenth century by one of the pupils, *Sha'arei Zedek* (Cracow, 1881, rpt. *Sha'arei Orah with Shaarei Zedek and Sefer Ha-Nikud*, Jerusalem 1994), ever mention equanimity (Idel 1988, 107). The term is mentioned in Eleazar Azikri's (1533–1600) *Sefer Haredim* where Azikri mentions Isaac of Acre as well as Isaac Luria. See Idel 1988, 132. Vital never mentions Luria in his discussion of equanimity in the *Shaarei Kedusha*. The Sufi influence on the circle of Kabbalists in sixteenth-century Safed is explored in Fenron 1994, 170–79; 2000. Equanimity as a state of mystical experience was also practiced by the Christian Hesychasts in Eastern Europe. The term *hesychia* means "calmness" and was a central devotional practice of these reclusive ascetics, whose movement began in the fourteenth century. This may also relate to Abulafia. See Wolfson 2012, 196n28. There is some speculation concerning whether or not these monks had any influence on early Hasidism. See Idel 2011b.

26. *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem*, 3:3, 108.

27. Most scholars who work on Vital accept the *Shaarei Kedusha* as from his hand. See, for example, Ben-Menahem 1982. In a new essay on part 4, Avishai Bar-Asher (2012) questions the veracity of authorial attribution of at least the first three sections. However, Bar-Asher acknowledges that he has no evidence aside from manuscript inconsistencies to back up his theory. Hence, we will proceed as if *Shaarei Kedusha* is the product of Vital. There is one very literal and nonacademic translation of the fourth part of the *Shaarei Kedusha* that I consulted when rendering my translation. See Hadani and Getz 2006.

28. See *Shaarei Kedusha* (Constantinople, 1644), 1. Cf. Bar-Asher 2012. There are essentially four extant manuscripts: British Library Add 19788; British Library Or. 9167; Moscow, Ginzburg 691; and Bar Ilan University 1211.

29. *Shaarei Kedusha* (Constantinople, 1644), 35b. In the Moussaief ms. 22878 the transcriber notes at the conclusion of the third part, "The conclusion (i.e., the fourth part) was not printed because of its holiness." Cited in Bar-Asher 2012.

30. See, e.g., Idel 1985, 117–20; 1988, 126–40; 1990, 59–73.

31. This is not only true of mystics. See, e.g., Heschel 1996; Schweid 1999, esp. 9–20; Kreisel 2001, 1–26. There is also much written on prophecy in the thought of Abraham Isaac Kook (d. 1936). See Bin-Nun 2007. Prophecy also becomes a central motif in the twentieth-century Hasidic master Kalonymous Kalman Shapira of Piasczno, particularly in his *Mevo Shearim* (Jerusalem, 1962).

32. See, e.g., *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 2005), 3:3, 108–10. The connection between prophecy and the advent of the messianic era is also at play here as Vital (like Abulafia) had his own messianic aspiration. See, e.g., Idel 1998, 164–69.

33. Albotini's Kabbalistic work *Sulam ha-Aliyah* (Ladder of Ascent) was written sometime in the early sixteenth century and was not published in full until the twentieth century, although it was well known beforehand. Along with the anonymous *Sha'arei Zedek*, likely written by a student of Abulafia, the *Sulam*

ha-Aliyah is one of the best-known Kabbalistic texts that openly utilizes meditative techniques drawn from Abulafia's writings. To the best of my knowledge, the most recent edition is *Sulam ha-Aliyah/Shaarei Zedek* (Jerusalem: Shaarei Ziv Institute, 1989).

34. This is according to the 1988 Ahavat Shalom edition. The Annon Gross 2005 edition *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem* places section 3 before section 2. This seems somewhat odd given that section 2, which consists of long quotations of medieval Kabbalists affirming the legitimacy of prophecy and contemplation, would be better placed as a prerequisite for the actual contemplative techniques.

35. Bar-Asher (2012) notes that there are various other small sections in the printed text that may not be a part of either of these two groups. There are essentially three manuscripts that all printed editions utilize and these manuscripts differ quite extensively.

36. See, for example, *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 2005), 3:6, 123.

37. For an annotated English translation of Vital's diary published as *Sefer Hizonot* (Book of Visions), see Faierstein 1999, 41–243.

38. It may be that Vital already was exposed to Abulafia through Cordovero at a young age. See Idel 1988b, 128–31.

39. Idel notes that the Italian Kabbalist Mordecai Dato's *Iggeret Ha-Levanon* mentions Cordovero's use of Abulafian techniques. "Know that the man, Moses Cordovero, took for himself the vocation of letter and vowel combination. He practiced it successfully and successfully trained others in this art." On Abulafia's influence on Cordovero, see Scholem 1961, 378n14; 1974, 181.

40. Vital studied with Elijah da Vidas, author of the pietist classic *Reshit Hokhma* (Beginning of Wisdom) first published in Venice in 1579. The text, a dense collection and analysis of rabbinic and Kabbalistic sources, was so popular that Jacob Poyetto published a condensed version, *Reshit Hokhma Ha-Qazar*, in Venice in 1600. For a partial translation of Poyetto's text, see Fine 1984, 92–156. Moses Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah* (Palm Tree of Deborah) and *Hanhagot* (Rules of Mystical Piety) are more basic approaches toward similar ends. We can assume that Vital was very aware of a body of literature that focused on contemplative behavior. Very little, however, delineated the technical aspect of the contemplative's prophetic aspirations.

41. See, for example, Vital's *Sefer Hizonot* (Jerusalem, 1866). An abbreviated and corrupt version of this text appeared as *Shivhei Rabbi Hayyim Vital* (Ostrag, 1826). In English see Faierstein 1999, 3–30.

42. Getshon Scholem (1974, 447) notes, for example, that in Vital's commentary to the *Zohar* written before he met Luria, he added occasional remarks in a Lurianic vein after his association with him. However, his pre-Lurianic commentary to the Torah *Etz Ha-Daat Tov* (1864) remains void of Lurianic influence. See also Avivi 1981; Magid 2008, 75–110.

43. See David Ibn Zamra, *Teshuvot Radbaz*, volume 5, number 34. Abulafia is also mentioned numerous times in Ibn Zamra's *Magen David* (1710).

44. On Abulafia in Safed, see Idel 1988, 131–40. In his introduction to Abulafia's *Sefer Ha-Heshek*, Mattisyahu Safran writes of numerous earlier Kabbalists who cite Abulafia as a justification for printing Abulafia's works. He also mentions Vital's own introduction to the *Shaarei Kedusha* (see *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem*, 3) where Vital writes of his receiving a tradition directly from Luria. Safran implies that this refers to Abulafia, but in fact Vital is simply making a point about revealing and concealing secrets in his writings. Abulafia is absent from Luria's writings as far as we know.

45. For a general discussion, see Huss 2008. On the work of Ahavat Shalom publishing and its director Yaakov Moshe Hillel, see Meir 2001, 2007.

46. Hillel, "Introductory Remarks" to *Sefer Kisei Eliyahu*, 38, 39; cited in Meir 2007, 258n613.

47. See Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah* (Jerusalem, 2002) and Idel 1990a, esp. 54–76.

48. Del Medigo's criticism of Kabbalah can be found in his *Behmat Ha-Dat*, originally published in Basil in 1589. A critical edition was done by Jacob J. Ross. See *Behmat Ha-Dat of Elijah Del-Medigo* (Tel

Aviv: Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, 1984). Cf. Bland 1992. Modena's attack on Kabbalah, *Ari Nohem*, is analyzed in Dweck 2011. One can also see this phenomenon later in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe in the work of Ezekiel Landau of Prague. On this see Flatto 2010.

49. By "anarchic traditionalism" I mean the emergence of ultra-traditional communities that do not fit into existing hierarchical communal structures, be they Hasidic courts or existing mystical communities. They are often led by young charismatic figures who do not rise up through the normative ranks of authority and who draw from a plethora of mystical schools and traditions instead of being wed to one particular approach. The eclecticism of such communities makes them popular with more marginal individuals such as *baalei teshuva* (newly religious).

50. One can see this phenomenon in the rise of independent Kabbalists in Jerusalem who are not bound to any one tradition and engage in syncretistic Kabbalism. Two examples are the anonymous work *Yam Shel Hokhma* by Yizhak Meir Morgenstern and the anonymous collection *Bilvavi Mishkan Evaneh* by Itamar Schwartz. On Schwartz, see Wolfson 2011a. On this phenomenon more generally, see Garb 2011. Garb writes, "... the mystical-spiritual Haredi world, and specifically the Hasidic community, is undergoing a renaissance or revival, which includes return to early Hasidic forms of spirituality such as non-dynastic leadership, ... hyper nomian practices; cultivation of intense ecstatic states and extensive re-interpretation of classical texts" (125).

51. Kaplan's *Meditation and Kabbalah* (1982, 190–98) also includes a translation of the last two gates of part 3 of the *Shaarei Kedusha* (*Shaarei Kedushah*). For some biographical data and discussion on Kaplan, see the three-part posting "Aryeh Kaplan: A Lost Homily from his Iowa Pulpit and Outreach at SUNY-Albany," on Alan Brill's "The Book of Doctrines and Opinions: Notes on Jewish Theology and Spirituality," <http://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2012/01/30/aryeh-kaplan-a-lost-homily-from-his-d-c-pulpit-and-outreach-at-suny-albany>. Accessed on June 1, 2014. There is also the contemporary Jewish Renewal movement that utilizes certain Kabbalistic techniques wedded to Buddhist practices in order to foster contemplation. Renewal, however, is more committed to Hasidic techniques that are often much less technical. One does not find much Abulafian influence in contemporary Renewal spirituality, although the recent publications of the Abulafian corpus from manuscript may change this.

52. For some studies of Scholem, see Bloom 1975; Biale 1979; Wasserstrom 1999; Jacobson 2003.

53. The relationship between Kabbalah and language was a central issue in Gershom Scholem's early career. See, for example, Scholem 1982. Many others have included their voices in this important issue. See Bloom 1975; Idel 1992; Katz 1992; Abrams 2000; Wolfson 2005, 1–45.

54. See Hayyim Vital's "Introduction" to *Shaar Ha-Hakdamot* (printed as the Introduction to *Etz Hayyim*). *Etz Hayyim* (Jerusalem: Makor Hayyim, n.d.), 4c/d.

55. The Scholem epigraph is cited in Cole 2012, xiv.

56. For Bialik's seminal essay on language, see his "Gilluy vekhissuy balashon" in Bialik 1948, 191–93. In English see Bialik 1973, 2000, 11–26. Cf. Yadin 2001. On Scholem and language, see Cutter 1990; Shahar 2008.

57. See "Confession on the Subject of Our Language" in Derrida 2002, 226; cited in Shahar 2008, 301. More ominously, Shahar notes that for Scholem, "The Zionist attempt to transform Hebrew, the language that carries God's words, into a spoken and useful language, is an enterprise with horrific implications." Further, he notes that for Scholem, "secular language can be understood as equivalent to 'practical magic,' a vulgar misuse and a 'demonic' praxis of the sacred" (311). For another analysis of Scholem's letter, see Derrida 2002, 189–227. An English translation of Scholem's letter can be found on pages 226–27 in Derrida 2002 and Wiskind 1990. Another translation with the German original appears in Cutter 1990, 416–18; Moses 2009, 168–69.

58. In a 1974 essay titled "My Way to Kabbalah," Scholem notes that he initially intended to write a dissertation on the linguistic theory of Kabbalah but realized he was not adequately prepared. See Scholem 1997, 21.

59. David Biale notes the irony in the fact that Scholem wrote his letter on the essence of Hebrew in German. See Biale 1979, 205. See also the communication between Buber and Rosenzweig on translation collected in *Scripture and Translation* (1994).

60. I think the phallogocentric allusion of translation as "penetration," while perhaps not conscious on Scholem's part, may speak to a particular inclination of the early scholars of Kabbalah. The feminine in Kabbalah remains a matter of scholarly debate, but early scholars, and perhaps Scholem in particular, very much aligned with the Kabbalists whom they were interpreting (who were exclusively men) and who used highly gendered language to describe the cosmos. For important studies on Kabbalah and gender, see Liebes, 1994, 67–119; Wolfson 1996; Idel 2005.

61. Letter, Gershom Scholem to Franz Rosenzweig, 1926. For a translation of this letter, see Cutter 1990, 417–18.

62. This comes close to Walter Benjamin's comment in "The Task of the Translator." See Benjamin 1968, 76–77.

63. Scholem's 1926 letter to Franz Rosenzweig begins, "This country is a volcano! It harbors the language!"

64. This is not to say that Kavka is disagreeing with Bialik. He is just looking at translation from a different perspective.

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Shaarei Kedusha (Gates of Holiness)**Hayyim Vital (1542–1620)**Selected, Translated, and Annotated by Shaul Magid***The First Gate***(The necessary conditions required for an individual to be prepared to apprehend the divine)*

א' Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair taught, "Enthusiasm leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to purity, purity leads to restraint, restraint leads to holiness, holiness leads to humility, humility leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to acquiring the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit leads to resurrection of the dead, resurrection comes through Elijah the Prophet." There are numerous versions of this teaching that I did not include (Mishna Sota 9:15).²

ב—We read in a letter by Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides)³ that he sent his son from Acco to Barcelona, *Listen my son, to the teachings of your father and do not leave the Torah of your mother* (Proverbs 1:8), behave in a way that all your works are pleasant to everyone at all times. This is the way to avoid anger, which is a terrible trait that brings one to sin, as the sages teach that one who is angry is plagued by all manner of Gehenna, as it says, "All who get angry are plagued with all kinds of hell, as it further says, *Remove anger from your heart and let evil pass over your flesh* (Ecclesiastes 11:10)" (b.T. Nedarim 22a).⁴ "There is no evil without Gehenna, as it says, *God made everything for a purpose, even the wicked for an evil day* (Proverbs 16:4)." Thus when one is liberated from anger, humility will enter the heart, which is the best of the best, as it says, *The foundation of humility is the fear of God* (Proverbs 22:4). And from humility one will come to fear of God so that the heart will always ask "from where did you come?" and "where are you headed?" And you will always live as if you are like a worm in your life, and even your death. And one will always know before whom he will give an accounting, before the King of

Glory,⁵ as it says, *Even the heavens in their innermost reaches cannot contain You* (1 Kings 8:27).⁶ Even in the heart of the individual, as it says, *For I fill both heaven and earth declares the Lord* (Jeremiah 23:24). When one thinks about all of this, one will have fear of the creator and distance oneself from sin. Embodying these traits will bring happiness. When one acts with humility, one will be embarrassed by and fearful of sin. At that time, the Holy Spirit and the shining of God's countenance will descend upon him, and this is the life of the World to Come.⁷

Now my child you should know and understand that arrogance destroys worlds because grandeur (*pe'er*) is the garment of the heavenly King, as it says, *The Lord is King who is robed in grandeur* (Psalm 93:1). How does a person become arrogant? If through wealth, *God is the one who makes one wealthy* (1 Samuel 2:7). If through honor, that too is God's as it says, *Wealth and honor are before You* (1 Chronicles 29:12). How does one give homage to the grandeur of God? If through wisdom, *He deprives trusted me of speech and takes reason away from the elders* (Job 12:20). We thus see that everything is equal before God. Through God's will the arrogant will fall and the downtrodden will be raised. Hence you should submit yourself to the Blessed One.

I will now explain to you the way to consistently act with humility: All your words should be pleasant, your head should be bowed, and your eyes gazing only downward. Your heart should be directed heavenward, and do not stare at a person when speaking to him. Every individual should be greater than you in your eyes; give honor to the rich and poor alike, if he should be poor and you rich, or if you are wiser, it should appear to you that you owe him and that he deserves more than you. For example, if he sins, it should be considered accidental. If you sin, it should be considered intentional.

One should concentrate all of one's actions, words, and thoughts at all times in one's heart as if one is standing before God (*hamakom*)⁸ and God's *shekinah*⁹ is upon him, because God's glory encompasses the world. One's words should be filled with awe and trepidation like a servant before his master. One should be humbled (lit., embarrassed; *mitbayesh*) in the presence of all people. If called, do not answer with a loud voice, rather answer pleasantly, as if he is standing before his master, the Holy Blessed One.

3. See Mishna Avot 2:14.

6. This is an adaptation of Mishna Avot 3:1, "Akavia ben Mehalelel taught: Recalling three things will prevent you from sin: Know from where you came, know where you are going, and know before whom you stand in judgment. Where did you come from? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To the worms. Before whom do you stand in judgment? Before the Holy One, Blessed be He."

7. See *Shaarei Kedusha* 3:2, 101 and 107; *Shaarei Kedusha* 3:3, 108–10. There Vital makes a case that the descent of the Holy Spirit or what he calls there "prophecy" is a natural and even inevitable outcome of acting in this matter. The reason, he argues, is that the human/Adam is constructed of permutations of divine letters that are always seeking to return to their source in the Godhead. See *Shaarei Kedusha* 3:5, 117. But see *Shaarei Kedusha Ha-Shalem*, 2:2, 39, citing Midrash Elyahu Raba where man, woman, gentile, slave, and maidservant are all included, I am grateful to Elliot Wolfson (New York University) for pointing this out. What prevents that (re)union of divinity and divinity within the human are the barriers erected through sin. When those are lifted, the (re)union happens naturally.

8. On "place" (*hamakom*) as a euphemism for God, see Genesis Raba 69:9 and the popularization of that in the Passover Haggadah, "Blessed be the Place, Blessed be He."

9. The *shekinah* is a term used to denote divine presence in the world. It is sometimes used to define the lowest realm of the supernal worlds, likened to the lowest *sephirah* of *malkhut* (kingship), and sometimes more generally as "divine presence."

*The present translation is a partial rendering of part 4 of the *Shaarei Kedusha*. It does not include the final six pages of the text, which are devoted to letter diagrams and charts of letter combinations (*zeruf'ot*). Translating this material would be of little help. Instead, I have reproduced an example of the charts as they appear in the original text in order to give the reader a visual of the meditative template. I have utilized the Hebrew text contained in Vital 2005, with the source manuscript being unclear. Kaplan (1982, 190–98) translates the last two gates of part 3. A complete, but fairly literal and non-academic translation with no annotations has been published by Hadani (2006), which consists of the first three parts, and by Handai and Geiz (2006), which consists of the fourth part.

1. In classical Hebrew, like Greek, numbers are represented by letters. Like many other Kabbalistic texts, the *Shaarei Kedusha* divides its subsections using Hebrew letters as numbers. I have thus followed this in the translation.

2. See, for example, in b.T. Sota, 49b, Avodah Zara, 20b, Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat, 1:3.

3. *Igrot Ha-Ramban 'im Perush Igrot Petruha* (Jerusalem, 2009) letter no. 5, 18–20.

4. Cf. b.T. Berakhot, "Anger is the root of all evil (*kelippot*). Cf. b.T. Pesachim, 113b.

Be strident to constantly be engaged in (lit., read) Torah, which will enable one to fulfill it. When one completes one's study, one should consider how what one has learned can be applied. One should be careful to scrutinize one's actions both morning and night. In that way all one's days will contain repentance.¹⁰ One should remove all thoughts from the heart during prayer and direct the heart solely to God. One should think about what one wants to say before saying it. If one does this consistently with everything in one's life, one will not sin. In that way, all one's behavior will be with integrity (*kol ma'asekha yesharim*), one's prayers will be granted and fulfilled, and they will be received before God, as it says, *You will direct your heart and you will incline your ear* (Psalm 10:17). Read this missive (*ha-igeret*) once a week, not less than that, in order to always go in God's way in order to succeed in everything you do and you will merit the World to Come, the realm of the righteous. The day that you read it you will be answered from heaven as your heart desire.¹¹

ג—Isaac of Acre (late 13th–14th c.) wrote according to Moshe, a student of Joseph Gikatilla (1248–1305), what he heard directly from Gikatilla.¹² One who is committed to changing one's ways, striving after humility in a sincere manner, one who is truly humble and one who hears criticism and does not respond, that person will immediately merit the *shekinah*. He will not have to learn from others because in that state the spirit of God will teach him.

ד—I found written in Tractate Kallah, "Said Abba Elijah, 'The Torah will only be abandoned by one who is not meticulous about his devotion (*kapdan*). I will also not reveal any Torah to someone who is not meticulous about his devotion. Happy is one who encounters such a person and has the opportunity to sit with them. He will surely merit the World to Come.'"¹³

ה—It is written in the book *Brit Menuha* (Covenant of Comfort) (second half of the fourteenth century) according to the first path:¹⁴ Wisdom appears in three places. The first is northward in the place of judgment where arrogance is subsumed and it stands trembling before God. This place is called the Place of Fear and also called burning (*tivarah*). It is the name אגלה (*agilah*) that is included in Torah (*torah*); it acts without the need of purification (*taharah*); it extends the thread of fear (*yirah*).¹⁵ The second place where wisdom shows its face is in humility. Its name is called serenity (*menuhah*). It is the name יהודיא (*yehadriel*) of the God of Israel. The third place

10. See the exact location in another Safed Kabbalist of this period and older contemporary of Vital, Elijah da Vidas in his *Reshit Hokhma* (Jerusalem, 1972), "Gate of Humility," chapter 6, 235c.

11. This ends the citation from Nahmanides's letter to his son.

12. According to Abraham Azulai, he was also a student of Nahmanides. On Isaac of Acre, see Fishbane 2009. For an English translation of Gikatilla's famous work *Sha'ar 'Orah*, see Weinsrein 1995. In Hebrew see *Sha'ar 'Orah*, two volumes, J. Ben Shlomo ed. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1996).

13. Tractate Kallah cited here is actually Kallah Rabbati, one of the minor Talmudic tractates that can be found in standard editions of the Babylonian Talmud, volume 16 containing Tractate Avodah Zara. This citation can be found at the end of chapter 5, 53d in standard editions.

14. *Brit Menuha* is likely from Abraham Isaac of Granada attributed to Hamai Gaon. It was first published in 1648. *Brit Menuha* deals extensively with meditations according to letter combinations and the vocalizations (*nekudot*) of the Hebrew language. See, for example, Scholem 1974, 65, 105. The previous citation can be found in *Brit Menuha* (Jerusalem: Torat Ha-Nezah, 1979), 7b and top of 7c.

15. Note that all four words (*agilah*, *torah*, *taharah*, and *yirah*) rhyme.

where wisdom shows its face is in joy. Its divine name is מפרישמר (*mafrishma*). The three levels are thus fear, humility, and joy. Anyone who wants to learn wisdom must be connected to these levels. They should fear sin, be humble, and be satisfied with their lot.¹⁶ When one completes these three stages, one will achieve [esoteric] wisdom.

ז—Says the contemplative (*hamitboded*): If one wants to be successful at contemplation in order to achieve well-being (*shalom*), one must fulfill these three things and distance oneself from their opposite. Only then will one achieve well-being. This is all the more so regarding reward after death. They are the following: be satisfied with one's portion, love solitary meditation, and avoid positions of authority and honor.¹⁷

ח—It is written in the *Sefer Hasidim* (Book of the Pious) (no. 363): Be careful to speak the complete truth at all times and your dreams will be fulfilled like prophecy.¹⁸

ט—There is the story of a person who fasted often, acted righteously, and supported orphans but sought after positions of authority. He came to a group of contemplatives who had achieved prophecy. He approached the leader of the group and asked, "Master, can you kindly explain to me why after all my righteous acts I have not merited prophecy to tell the future like yourself?" The contemplative replied, "Take a pouch of nuts and figs and tie it around your neck. Go out to the public square of a city in front of all the dignitaries, gather together a group of children, and ask them, 'Do you want me to give you nuts and figs? If so, come and strike me with your hand on my neck and then on my cheek.' Do this repeatedly and then return to me and I will guide you on the path of apprehending the truth." The inquirer replied, "Master, how can a person as important as me do such a thing?" He replied, "You think that is such a big deal? That is a small thing compared to what you will have to do to see the light of truth." The inquirer rose and left in despair.

י—Elijah da Vidas (1518–1592), the author of the *Reshit Hokhma* (Beginning of Wisdom) (1558), told me in the name of his teacher Moses Cordovero (1522–1570), author of the *Pardes Rimmonim* (Orchard of Pomegranates) (1592):¹⁹ One should distance oneself from all manner of sin that causes the light of the *shekinah* to depart from the soul of the sinner. If a person acts in an evil manner, his soul will be severed from the light of the *shekinah* and it will remain in darkness. If he is righteous, one will find that the light of the *shekinah* accompanies him.

16. See Mishna Avot 2:8 and 4:1.

17. See Mishna Avot 6:6.

18. The *Sefer Hasidim* was from the circle of Judah the Pious known as the Hasidei Ashkenaz in the German Rhineland (early thirteenth century). Two editions exist from two different manuscripts: *Sefer Hasidim*, edited by Reuven Margoliot (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1957), and *Sefer Hasidim*, edited by Judah Ha-Kohen Wistinesky from the Parma manuscript (Jerusalem: Yagshel, 1998). Neither of these editions contain Vital's citation in no. 363. On the *Sefer Hasidim*, see Soloveitchik 2002. For an analysis of the interpretation of dreams in the *Sefer Hasidim*, see Wolfson 2011c, 155–56.

19. Elijah da Vidas and Moses Cordovero were both active in Safed at the same time in the sixteenth century. Vital studied with Cordovero, the leading Kabbalist in Safed before the arrival of Isaac Luria in 1570. Da Vidas's *Reshit Hokhma*, one of the most popular pietist (*musar*) texts to come from that period of Safed, was first published in Cracow in 1593. Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim* was first published in 1592.

—Isaac of Acre wrote: One of the conditions of separation (*perishut*) and contemplation (*hitbodedut*)²⁰ is distancing oneself from all manner of fault, malice, or sin, all of which cause the light of the *shekinah* to depart from the soul of the sinner. If individuals act in an evil manner, a distance is created between their souls and the *shekinah*, and they will remain in darkness. If they act in a goodly manner, the light of the *shekinah* will be found in their midst.²¹

The Second Gate

(Explaining the process of apprehending God)

This is the second category in the three paths to achieve divine apprehension. I will not explain any specific action in terms of the recitation of divine names but only in regard to thought or prayer.

You already know that all manner of apprehending the divine requires solitude so that the mind will not be distracted. The individual must be alone with his thoughts until the last moment and peel away his body from his mind/soul until he no longer feels that he is a material being but a purely spiritual entity. The more one is able to do this, the stronger one's apprehension will become. If one is disturbed by a noise or a movement, one's thought process will cease. Or, if one has thoughts of material existence, one's thought process will be disrupted and one's communion with the upper spheres will be severed, at which point one will apprehend nothing. This is because the holy spheres above do not rest on one who is attached to physicality, even tangentially.²² This is why prophecy and the Holy Spirit are called slumber (*tardama*), dream (*halom*), or vision (*hazon*). In the end even though a person may be fit to attain the Holy Spirit, if he does not accustom himself to sever his body from his soul, he will not achieve it. This is the secret as to why the disciples of the prophets used musical instruments (drums and fifes) (1 Samuel 10:5).²³ They were able to enter into a sustained state of contemplation and separation of body and soul by means of the sweetness of the music. At that moment, the musician ceased playing and the prophets continued in their state of communion and prophesied. This is the first condition.

The second condition is that one must dispose of anything that would cause an interruption in contemplation. The first condition only speaks about physical things or natural things that disrupt contemplation. Now we are speaking about spiritual things that disrupt contemplation. These include all manner of defiled things from the evil inclination (*yezer hara*) that attach themselves to a person and are strengthened through sinful acts.

Therefore one who comes to contemplate God must first repent from all manner of sin and be scrupulous to avoid sin in the future.²⁴ Afterward one must accustom oneself to remove the evil character traits that are embedded in oneself, such as anger, depression, rigidity, frivolity, and the like. After one heals the sick soul from sin, one should remove the power of defilement from interrupting communion with the upper spheres. By these means one will accustom oneself to nullify physicality as we mentioned in the first condition, and after all this one will succeed in cultivating communion with the upper spheres, as I will explain according to what I have found in holy books and in the words of the contemplatives themselves. Regarding this second condition that is focused on removing the forces of defilement, this is accomplished through repentance and the removal of negative character traits.²⁵ We have already explained this in the first category according to what I have found in the holy books. Since I have already taught you these two conditions, I will mention certain behaviors that cultivate communion with the upper spheres that are applicable only after one has accomplished the first two conditions.

—The contemplative should find solitude, wrap himself in a prayer shawl, and sit with his eyes closed.²⁶ He should separate himself from his material existence as if his soul has left his body and ascended to heaven. After achieving this separation he should recite any Mishna²⁷ he chooses, repeating it again and again as quickly as he can, as long as the recitation is clearly articulated and he does not skip any words.²⁸ During this recitation he should concentrate on binding himself with the rabbinic sage (Tanna) whose teaching is recorded in that Mishna. Through this exercise he should imagine (*titkhaven*) that his mouth is a vessel out of which the letters of that Mishna emerge. And [he should further imagine that] the sound that comes forth from that vessel, which is his mouth, are the sparks of his inner soul that pour forth and recite that Mishna.²⁹ This will make a chariot that will house the soul of the sage whose teaching is recorded in that Mishna. And his soul will envelop the soul of the one performing the recitation. If he is successful in his recitation of the language of the Mishna, and if he is adequately prepared, it is possible that his mouth will find a place in the soul of that [rabbinic] sage and will be enveloped there in his act of recitation. At that point, as he recites the Mishna, he [the rabbinic sage] will speak through his mouth and grant him peace. At that time, all of the thoughts and queries that he might have will be answered by that sage. He will speak through his mouth, and his ears will

20. *Hitbodedut*, or concentration, is a central tenet of Vital's treatise and a common trope for medieval Kabbalistic exercises of achieving the Holy Spirit and prophecy. See, for example, Idel's "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah" in his *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (1988b), 103–69.

21. It is unclear if this reference is from Isaac's more popular *Me'irat Einyanim* or his *Ozar Hayyim*. In any case, the linkage of separation (*perishut*) and contemplation (*hitbodedut*) is a signature notion in Isaac's work. See, for example, Fishbane 2009, 248–82. Isaac's further connection of these two to prophecy had obvious influence on Vital in this treatise.

22. *Ke-khut ha-sarav*, literally, by a thread.

23. Cf. 2 Kings 3:15

24. See Fine 1992. Cf. *Shavrei Kedusha* 3:3, 110.

25. See, for example, in Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhma*, "Gate of Repentance," 100–27. Cf. Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah* (London, 2003). This new edition reprints the first Venice edition. Vital seemed to have modeled the *Shavrei Kedusha* after Cordovero's popular works, the *Tomer Devorah* and *Or Neriav*, although he rarely cites them in his fourth part, relying on much earlier Kabbalistic literature. Much of parts 1, 2, and 3 of *Shavrei Kedusha* resemble both *Tomer Devorah* and *Or Neriav* in tone, while the fourth part takes on a more practical contemplative tone.

26. This is a common technique in Kabbalah of which Vital was surely aware. See Moshe Idel's "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah" in Idel 1988b, 134–36.

27. The Mishna is the earliest compilation of rabbinic texts, redacted in the second century in Palestine.

28. On recitation of the Mishna and mystical experience in Vital, see Fine 1982.

29. See *Shavrei Kedusha* 3:3, 115. There Vital speaks about an angel speaking through the contemplative as an example of prophecy using 2 Samuel 23:2, the same verse he uses here. In Abraham Ibn Hasdai's Hebrew translation of the Persian mystic Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), there is mention of repetition of God's name allowing "one's tongue to move by itself." This notion of repetition, in Vital of any Mishna, is a product of Sufi influence, given that in the Kabbalistic imagination, Mishna (as Oral Torah or Torah of the Mouth) is of divine origin. See Idel 1988b, 106.

hear his words. He no longer will be speaking, but the sage will be speaking through him. This is the secret meaning of the verse, *The spirit of God has spoken through me; His message is on my tongue* (2 Samuel 23:2).³⁰

If the contemplative is not yet fully prepared for this high level, his experience might be otherwise. In the quick repetition of his recitation his words will come forth without any intention and he will achieve a hypnotic state. In that state he will see a vision and his question will be answered, either in a hint or with clarity. This all depends on one's preparedness. If one does not achieve one of these two experiences, one should know that one is not yet ready for this. Or, perhaps, one did not adequately separate oneself from the material world.

One must purify one's soul from all manner of spiritual defilement and cleanse oneself from all manner of theft, bribery, and the like, as it says, *Who may stand in God's holy place?* (Psalms 24:3). *He who has clean hands and a pure heart.* One should be cleansed through and through, as it says, *and a pure heart*; only then, *he will carry away a blessing from God*, this refers to prophecy (Psalms 24:3-4), as it is written, *And he took up his theme* (Numbers 23:7) and bound his spirit above. Afterward this will be brought down below. First, one should think about the reasons for the commandments in their exoteric meaning and only then in their esoteric meaning.³¹ Study Torah, perform the *mitzvot*, and cease from idle chatter throughout the day. One should immerse in a ritual bath (*mikve*), dress in white garments in a clean place, and avoid all manner of defilement. One should avoid contact with a corpse and cemeteries, avoid all manner of anguish and depression, and wrap oneself in joy.³² One should separate from material needs and allow one's thought to ascend the heavenly spheres until the seventh sphere called *aravot*.³³ Imagine that above the sphere of *aravot* there is another sphere of pure whiteness. There one should imagine this is the place of YHVH written in Assyrian script in very large letters.³⁴ Each letter is like a

mountain, white like snow.³⁵ One should then connect the letter Y [of YHVH] with the letter H, and H with Y, and V with the first H. And the first H with the V. And the V with the final H and the final H with the Y.

The contemplative who sits in solitude with his eyes closed should preferably also don the prayer shawl (*talit*) and phylacteries (*tefillin*).³⁶ After emptying one's thoughts, one should think of one word, any word, in all its letter permutations. For example, if one chooses the word "land" (ארץ), imagine it in the following manner: ארצ, רצא, ראץ, צאר, צרא. One can do this with any word, as long as it is done following the linear manner of permutations. At that point one should separate oneself from the material world as if one's soul has left the body and has ascended and become enveloped in those letter permutations. One should continue to ascend from sphere to sphere until the seventh sphere, which is called *aravot*. Imagine there is a sphere above *aravot*, a sphere of pure white like snow and that the letter permutations imagined occupy that sphere, written in Assyrian script with white fire.³⁷ Each letter [should be imagined] as a mountain or a hill. Then one should imagine asking questions from those permutations that are written there. They will answer his question, or place their spirit in his mouth, or he will fall asleep and the answer will come in a dream or as we have mentioned in section 1.³⁸

I have found something similar to what I wrote in section 1 that I will reproduce in an abbreviated fashion here: *For who would otherwise dare approach Me* (Jeremiah 30:21) . . . and when I was young . . . I saw the deficiency of those in my time in this lofty wisdom. People do not study it. I therefore *set my face like a flint* (Isaiah 50:7) and I engaged *the man dressed in linen* (Daniel 12:7) . . . I ran quickly toward my teacher and bowed my face to the ground. . . . In the way of veneration according to Kabbalah, as I received it directly, and I called out "Answer me my righteous God, amen."³⁹

The enlightened know that this [what is referred to in the previous paragraph] is the wisdom of Kabbalah that was utilized by many. I have seen many books regarding the secrets of Torah. However, the practice (*shimush*) that can be drawn from this is largely concealed except for individuals who received it directly from their teachers.⁴⁰ I greatly desired this and so I begged

30. This seems to be an example of soul impregnation (*ibbur*), which is a popular theme in Lurianic Kabbalah whereby a disembodied soul enters a person's body to perform some kind of function, either to rectify itself or to aid the individual. In this case, one calls down by repeating his teaching cited in the Mishna a departed sage who then speaks Torah through the mouth of the contemplative.

31. Reasons for the commandments, or *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*, occupy a central place in medieval Jewish philosophical and later Kabbalistic thinking. Moses Maimonides devotes close to one third of his magnum opus *Guide for the Perplexed* to this issue. See Heinemann 1949; Katz 1980; Matt 1986. Medieval Kabbalists such as Ezra of Gerona focused their attention on *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* that continued in the *Zohar* corpus. See Ezra of Gerona's "Commentary to Song of Songs" (erroneously attributed to Moses Nahmanides) in Chavel 1964, 2:485-517. Cf. Travis 2002. The latter dissertation includes a critical Hebrew edition and translation of Ezra's treatise on the *mitzvot*. Menahem Recanat's (fourteenth century) *Ta'amei Ha-Mitzvot* (Basel, 1581, reprint London: L. Honig and Sons, 1962) is a classical rendition of postmedieval Kabbalistic *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*. This exercise continues throughout the Lurianic corpus and into Hasidism.

32. Avoiding a cemetery has to do with contracting *tumat met*, or a state of spiritual defilement, by coming into contact with a corpse. Even though these laws no longer apply since the possibility of becoming pure requires a Temple ritual no longer possible (thus everyone is in this state of defilement), contemplatives and pietists still try to avoid contact with the dead unless they are required to do so by taking part in a burial ritual that is considered an obligatory *mitzvah*.

33. See b.T. Hagigah 12b and Zohar 2.56b.

34. Assyrian script, or *ketav ashurit*, is the script that is used to write Torah scrolls and all ritual objects, for example, *tefillin*, *mezuzot*, among others. See b.T. Shabbat 115b, Megillah 9a, Cf. Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 1:11, 71b, where Assyrian is considered the script best suited for writing.

35. Snow as a metaphor for purity is used in prophetic and liturgical literature. See, for example, Isaiah 1:18; *Mahzor for Yom Kippur*, "Morning Blessings," "whiten like snow the sins of your people"; *Mahzor for Yom Kippur*, "Recitation of the Amidah for Yom Kippur," "Whiten our sins like wool . . ."

36. This is a common practice in Jewish pietistic literature.

37. On "white fire," see Rabbi Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmon*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1962), 24:14, 52d, 51a and Cordovero, *Or Nétzer* (Jerusalem, 1999), part 7, chapter 1, 59.

38. This contemplative exercise concentrating on letter permutations activates a downward flow of spirit that reveals the answer to the contemplative's question. This is a very Abulafian technique. However, see *Shemrei Kedusha*, 3:6, 123, where Vital speaks forcefully against practical Kabbalah by bringing examples of Solomon Molcho and Joseph della Rena, whom he claims were destroyed because of their use of practical Kabbalah.

39. The source of this account is unclear. Vital writes that he "found it in a book" but never reveals its source. This seems odd because throughout this treatise he is careful to mention his sources.

40. This appears to be the main purpose of this treatise. Vital wants to articulate the contemplative practice of Kabbalistic theosophy that he has woven together from medieval sources refracted through his Lurianic lenses. There is an important distinction here between "practical Kabbalah," or: *kabbalah ma'asit*, and what I would call "operative Kabbalah," or *kabbalah shimushit*. The former focuses on the use of amulets or prayers to change the course of human events. The latter is focused on the use of Kabbalistic principles to foster experience of divine worlds and thus gain access to knowledge not attainable through ordinary means.

my teacher [to reveal it to me]. I will give you some advice: Know, my brother, that when you enter into the operational dimension (*shimush*) of Kabbalah, do it in this fashion. Take the ten *sephiroth* and all that is in them. For example, take the words that are specific to particular *sephiroth* as explained in the books of Kabbalah. Take each word alone. Take the first word and rotate it and do the same to each word as it is written in the *Sefer Yezeriah* (Book of Creation) (4:12).⁴¹ Every word has a three-letter root from which can be constructed six "houses" (*batim*). And these six houses can further produce twenty four houses. For example, the first *sephirah* is called *ani* or "I" (אני). From this word one can make six permutations: א"י, י"א, א"י, א"י, א"י, א"י. You can do this with every word (using its three-letter root) until you complete this exercise with all ten *sephiroth*. Regarding this letter rotation, you can write each one according to its level, which is called "the secret of levels."⁴² Be careful not to err in these permutations because an error will cause much anguish. One must also master the secret of the vowels that bring the words to life (lit., into motion). The letters are likened to matter and the vowels are the form, as is explained in the way of vocalization. When one wants to place vowels onto the permuted letters, begin with the word itself and then the permutations. (Author's addition: I have forgotten to explain this well in this book. You should look for it elsewhere). If not for the great effort it would take, I would have written most of them according to the names and *sephiroth*. If one finds other words, subject them to the permutations according to the examples that I have provided. Doing this to other words may not help but it will do no harm. When one completes all these rotations and permutations and wants to use them for some purpose, gaze above and below and be sure of the *sephiroth* to which they relate.

At the beginning of any month, one should fast, immerse in a ritual bath, purify one's thoughts, and focus on one of the Psalms or the preliminary prayers in the liturgy. You will be answered from heaven. Recall all the words in their rotations and their vocalizations with their vowels from the upper ones to the lower ones.⁴³

When one lays down to sleep, one should recite the prayer "May it be God's will . . ." concentrating on one of the words in that prayer and on the *sephirah* from which it is drawn.⁴⁴ One should remember one's query to know a dream or the future or perhaps to understand other matters. Be careful not to eat any animal product the entire night if one eats after the completion of the fast (the fast is from sunrise to an hour after sunset).

I found this in close proximity to what I already mentioned: On the first of the month when the [new] moon begins to move toward its fullness, the higher forces are drawn down to the lower spheres. And you, my brother, read what I taught you three times and know that it

contains deep secrets that those before you did not know. Then you will know the difference between the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor.⁴⁵ This does not come from us for we also only understood it after much effort. When one strives for this, one will know the names of the various levels, the ways of vocalization, and how they can be used. And I swear that this will be for you alone. This is all I found.

—In the *Sefer Meirat Eynaim* (Book of the Shining of the Eyes) it is written:⁴⁶ I, Isaac the young, son of Samuel from Acco say—In regard to either the elite or the masses, whomever wants to know the secret of tying his soul above and binding his thoughts to the supernal God in order to acquire uninterrupted thought and eternal life (*Olam Ha-Bah*; lit., the world that is coming), in order that God should be with him in this world and the next, he should do the following. He should place before his mind's eye the letters of the divine name as if they were written in a book in Assyrian letters. Each letter should be imagined as enormous, without limit. This is to say, when the letters of the divine name are placed before his mind's eye, he will see them but his thoughts will be in infinity (*eyn sof*).⁴⁷ His gaze and thoughts will be united. The is the secret of true cleaving (*ha-davuk*) as it is mentioned in the Torah: *And cleaving to him* (Deuteronomy 30:20), *And cleave to him* (Deuteronomy 10:20), *And you are cleaving* (Deuteronomy 4:4). As long as a person's soul cleaves to God in that manner, no evil will befall him nor will he err, not intellectually, not emotionally, and he will not be subject to accidents. When he is in that state [of *eyn sof*], he is above the physical world of accidents. In order to honor God be sure only to attempt this state of cleaving in a clean place, not in alleyways or other unclean places, not with unclean hands, and not in the presence of any idols, etc.

I once heard from a God-fearing wise man that witnessed the pious Rabbi Isaac, son of Rabbi Abraham ben David (Isaac the Blind), whom he served.⁴⁸ This man said of Rabbi Isaac, in all his days he never saw his own nakedness because he was blind. When he had to go somewhere he always asked a disciple to accompany him. When they would pass by a place of idolatry, he would quicken his pace. It appeared to me that he did this to honor God because his mind was in a constant state of cleaving, and due to the impurity of the idol he was forced to arrest this state of cleaving that is founded on purity. He thus hurried along in order to return to his previous state.

45. The distinction is first expressed in Genesis 31:53. Cf. *Zohar*, 1.165a and 213b. Nahor was the father of Terah, who was the father of Abraham. See Genesis 11:24. Nahor was also the brother of Abraham (Genesis 11:27), who was the father of Laban. Abraham's cousin Laban is viewed in Genesis as a worshiper of idols. Hence, "the god of Nahor" often refers in classical Judaism to idolatry. See Joshua 24:2.

46. The *Meirat Eynaim* is a Kabbalistic work by Isaac of Acre. The reference here can be found in the critical edition of *Meirat Eynaim* by Amos Goldreich, "*Sefer Meirat Eynaim* of R. Isaac of Acco," [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 1981), 217–18. See Fishbane 2009, 253–59, where Fishbane addresses Sufi influence on Isaac's theory of contemplation. Cf. Fenton 1995.

47. *Eyn sof*, literally, "without limit," refers to that dimension of God that is unknowable and beyond all differentiation, the realm of the divine above the cosmos. This seems to imply that if his thoughts are in *eyn sof*, the letters that he imagines will appear as *eyn sof* (without limit) as well.

48. Rabbi Isaac ben Avraham (1160–1235), also known as Yizhak Sagi Nahor (Isaac the Blind), was a leader among Provencal Kabbalists in the twelfth century, the circle that produced the *Bahir* (Book of Illumination). The latter is arguably the first Kabbalistic work that served as the foundation of the Kabbalah of *sephiroth*. See Scholem 1962, 248–89. Cf. Sender 1994. On his father, Abraham ben David of Posquieres (Rabad), a famous Talmudist and mystic, see Scholem 1962, 205–27; Twersky 1979.

41. *Sefer Yezeriah*, standard edition (Brooklyn, NY, 1988), 54, 55. In English, see Kaplan 1997, 4:15–16 and 185–93.

42. "The secret of levels" seems to refer to the hierarchical structure of ascending and descending Kabbalistic theosophy, from below (or smallness) to above (or greatness). See, for example, in *Mevo le-Hokmat ha-Kabbalah*, part 1, Fourth Gate, chapter 2.

43. The beginning of the month in the lunar calendar is considered to be a minor holiday in rabbinic tradition that includes special prayers of thanksgiving. Kabbalists have made much of this moment, symbolizing the birth of the new moon, with many fasting on the eve of the new month and celebrating on the first day of the new month with a festive meal and additional psalms.

44. This refers to the "Keriat Shema 'al ha Mita," or bedtime Shema liturgy. Lurianic Kabbalists make much of this prayer and its theosophical implications. *Pri Ets Hayyim* devotes eleven long chapters to this liturgy. See, in Vital, *Pri Ets Hayyim* in *Kitvei Ha-Ari* (Jerusalem, 1986), 13:319–43.

If you will ask: Why should we cleave our thought to this name (YHVH) more than all other divine names? It is because this name is the Cause of all Causes (*ilat ha-ilot*) and the source of all reason and includes everything in it, from *keter* (crown) until the *atarah* (*malkehut*, the diadem of *yesod*), from *eyn sof* to *eyn sof*.⁴⁹ This name (YHVH) is the source of all existence, from *keter* to the smallest mosquito, blessed be the name of God's kingdom for all eternity. Regarding this divine name, the psalmist sang: *I place this Name (YHVH) before me always, He is at my right hand; I shall not be moved* (Psalm 17:8). His eyes and his heart are constantly directed toward this name as if it was written before him. And when he says "my right hand" (*mi'yamini*) it is like *'ish yamini* (Esther 2:5), that is, one from the tribe of Benjamin (*Binyamin*), as if to say Binyamini. This also has the literal meaning of from the right side that is *gedulah* as is known.⁵⁰ The reception of that name is from the place of *gedulah*. We know generally that the name YHVH usually refers to *tiferet*, but it is mostly received from *gedulah*. Hence the verse, *I place this Name (YHVH) before me always* means that this emerges from the "right side" (*yamini, gedulah*). By means of putting the right side before me I will not err and be subject to accidents.⁵¹

From the works of Todros ha-Levi (ben Joseph Abulafia) (1255–1285) in his *Ozar ha-Kavod* (Storehouse of Glory) referring to a homiletic passage we read, "A person should always enter two doorways before praying" (b.T. Berakhot 8a).⁵² This means that he should enter through two doorways from the place where he is standing, that is, *gedulah* (greatness/kindness) and *gevurah* (judgment). And he should then enter *bina* (understanding) and should direct his prayers to her. And his thoughts should always be bound to *tiferet* because *tiferet* is what is alluded to in "from the place that he is standing" (b.T. Berakhot 8a). This is because the name YHVH is *tiferet*, which is the numerical value of "place" (*makom*; 186). This is referred to in the Passover Hagaddah in the words "Blessed be the Place, blessed be He."

After a person achieves this state of cleaving, he will achieve equanimity (*histavut*).⁵³ If one achieves equanimity, one can achieve contemplation. After achieving contemplation, one can

merit the Holy Spirit, and from there one can achieve prophecy, meaning that one can know the future.⁵⁴

Regarding the secret of equanimity, I was told a story by Rabbi Avner wherein one of the (aspiring) contemplatives asked him to be accepted by him as a contemplative. He said to him, "You are blessed by God for your intentions are good. Tell me, have you reached a state of equanimity?" He responded, "Teacher, explain what you mean." He responded, "If there are two men, one who honors you and one who denigrates you, are they equal in your eyes?" He replied, "No, I feel pleasure from the one who honors me and pain from the one who denigrates me. But I do not bear a grudge." Avner responded, "My son, go in peace. As long as they are not equal in your eyes, until you feel no difference between being honored and being denigrated, you are not ready for your thoughts to be bound to the upper spheres when you enter contemplation. Therefore, go and train yourself in true humility until you reach a state of equanimity, and then you will be prepared for contemplation."

Equanimity is achieved by means of attaching one's thoughts to God, which is the secret of cleaving, as we explained. When one's thoughts cleave to God, one will not dwell on whether one is being praised or denigrated, and one will pay no need to soothsayers, magicians, or diviners.

Recall that when God was with [King] Saul, his thoughts were bound to God, *And Saul had forbidden [recourse] to ghosts and familiar spirits in the land* (1 Samuel 28:3). Similarly, he did not notice that the scoundrels denigrated him because he was ruling over Israel (1 Samuel 10:27). When God departed from him, he turned into another person and went to inquire about diviners (1 Samuel 28:7). And he also became enraged at the righteous priests who were not guilty of any sin and spilled their innocent blood (1 Samuel 22:17).

Balaam began as a magician.⁵⁵ When he came to bless Israel, the *shekinah* descended upon him and he was enveloped by the Holy Spirit, and at that moment his thought cleaved to God and he never sought out magicians again (Numbers 24:1).⁵⁶ From all of this we learn that a person must subjugate himself in order to merit this state of cleaving to God. This can be done by a devoted commitment to *mitzvot* combined with a strong effort to achieve humility: One's eyes should always gaze downward while one's heart reaches heavenward.

1—The secret of cleaving with full concentration requires seeing oneself as a disembodied soul when one is praying or reciting psalms in order to draw down the Holy Spirit. For the enlightened one who comes to contemplation in order to accept upon himself the Holy Spirit, it is required that everything he apprehends and every bit of light that he sees from the beginning of his contemplative state will be considered as if it is only darkness from the side of defilement.⁵⁷ This is, in fact, true at the outset because his sins create a barrier except in the case where he is already

49. This is an odd phrase that I have not found anywhere else in Kabbalistic literature. I am not certain what Vital means here. *Keter* refers to that dimension where *eyn sof* and the cosmic world meet. In some Kabbalistic texts, *keter* implies *eyn sof*, and in other places it refers to the first place of divine differentiation, albeit one that cannot be discerned as in the lower *sephiroth* such as *hokhma* (wisdom) or *bina* (understanding). Hence *keter* is that ambiguous place where infinity and divine finitude merge.

50. Often the right side is known as *hesed*, but it is also known as *gedulah*, as in *Sefer Yezirah* and the *Bahir*. See *Sefer Yezirah* 2:10.

51. In theosophical Kabbalah, from the *Zohar* to Cordovero and then to Luria, the downward flow from the highest spheres comes through *hesed/gedulah* to *tiferet*, which is the place of resolution of the right and then left side. YHVH is the name describing *tiferet*. Vital here suggests that the verse is connected to the right (right hand, in Psalms), meaning that YHVH in *tiferet* is rooted in the "right side," which is *gedulah*.

52. The *Ozar Ha Kavod* was published in Warsaw in 1808. It is Todros Abulafia's Kabbalistic commentary on the homiletic (aggadic) portions of the Talmud.

53. The notion of equanimity is a central tenet of Sufi mysticism, which was an important part of Isaac of Acre's work. Moshe Idel notes that aside from other similarities between Abulafia's Kabbalah and Sufi mystics, neither Abulafia nor the anonymous medieval Kabbalistic work written sometime at the end of the thirteenth century by one of the pupils, *Shu'arei Zedek* (Cracow, 1881; reprint, *Shu'arei Oran with Shu'arei Zedek and Sefer Ha-Nikud*, Jerusalem, 1994), ever mention equanimity. See Idel 1988b, 107. The term is mentioned in Eleazar Azikri's (1533–1600) *Sefer Haredim*, where Azikri mentions Isaac of Acre as well as Isaac Luria. See Idel 1988b, 132. Vital never mentions Luria in his discussion of equanimity in the *Shu'arei Kedusha*. The Sufi influence on the circle of Kabbalists in sixteenth-century Safed is explored in Fenton 1994 and 2000. Equanimity as a state of mystical experience was also practiced by the Christian Hesychasts in Eastern Europe. The term "Hesychia" means "stillness" and was a central devotional practice of these reclusive ascetics, whose movement began in the fourteenth century. This may also relate to Abulafia. See Wolfson 2012, 196n28. There is some speculation concerning whether these monks had any influence on early Hasidism. See Idel 2011a.

54. Linking the spiritual achievement of cleaving (*devekut*) to attaining the Holy Spirit and to prophecy, which is central in these texts, seems to be under the influence of Abraham Abulafia's prophetic Kabbalah.

55. See b.T. Sanhedrin 106a.

56. Balaam is a somewhat odd example for Isaac of Acre to use to illustrate acquiring the Holy Spirit. Throughout Jewish tradition, Balaam is viewed as a villain, based on the reference to him in Deuteronomy 23:5: *and because they hired Balaam son of Beor . . . to curse you*. In Lurianic Kabbalah, he is somewhat redeemed, albeit only through a process of soul transmigration. See Magid 2008, 143–95.

57. That is, he will refuse to recognize his exalted state. This appears to be part of the devotional practice of self nullification, here meaning the nullification of one's mystical experience.

a *zaddik gamur* (completely righteous person).⁵⁸ If he is in the Diaspora (outside the Land of Israel), even if he is a *zaddik gamur* with no barriers, the defiled state of the Diaspora and dwelling among the nations will separate him from true apprehension of the divine.⁵⁹ Therefore, when one senses he has achieved a little, he should intensify his contemplative practice. And even in that intensification he should view that apprehension as rooted in defilement. He should continue in this way until he sees that the spirit from the place of holiness begins to speak through him, against his will, words of pure Torah. When he achieves this state, he should continue and force himself to draw down this Holy Spirit again and again until he collapses from exhaustion.

When he reaches that state of collapse, he should strengthen himself and recite the following with great force: "Master of the universe, your holy throne has been revealed to me. I have not done this for my honor but to honor your Name and to give honor to your unity so that I should know you in order to serve you; so that I should bless your name and your dominion like David your servant and faithful messiah and his son Solomon. And you, Solomon, my son, know your father and serve him (1 Chronicles 28:9). Make yourself present to me, seek me out, I am your faithful servant, strengthen me and enlighten my eyes lest I pass away. Hide your face from my sins, and may all my sins be blotted out. God created me with a pure heart and an upright spirit that should be renewed in me. Return to me the joy of your salvation and support me with a willing spirit." One should continue this way until he knows that the spirit is engraved in him and has become bound in a way that the covenant becomes inseparable. This is the secret of the verse, *And I will maintain my covenant with him in an everlasting covenant* (Genesis 17:19). This is the secret meaning regarding each time the covenant is mentioned with respect to the (biblical) patriarchs.

1.—In the book *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* (Structure of Divinity)⁶⁰ it is written: Now that you know the structure of the human (*zurat ha-adam*), you are able to understand if you have received a true vision of prophecy that was revealed to the prophets. The Talmudic sages called this prophetic vision the full-bodied divine body (*shiur koma*; lit., the measure of height). This is the secret of one who knows the Creator (*Yözer Bereshit*). This is the meaning of the verse, *Let us make the human in our image and our likeness* (*kadmuteinu*) (Genesis 1:26). On this vision it is said: . . . *And spoke parables through the prophets* (Hosea 12:11). Isaac gave this a sign, the word image (*temunah* = 501) is the same numerical value (*gematria*) as "the face of the human" (*parzuf adam* = 501).

58. The notion of the *zaddik gamur* is one who has permanently overcome his battle with his evil inclination. See *Zohar* 2:117b; Vital, *Shäar Ha-Gilgulim*, with Bnei Aaron (Jerusalem, 1990), "Introduction," 10, 85.

59. The relationship between Jewish devotion and the Land of Israel versus the Diaspora is based on the Talmudic dictum. "One who lives in Israel is like one who has a God and one who lives outside the land of Israel is as if he does not have a God," b.T. Ketubot 110b. Cf. b.T. Baba Bara 158b, "The air of the Land of Israel makes one wise." In Kabbalah more generally, see Idel 1986.

60. *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* (1558, reprinted Jerusalem, Nezah Books, 1963), 143, 144. *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* was written by an unknown author at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The commentary to this work by Yehudah Hayyat, *Minhat Yehuda*, is an important resource for the nexus of philosophy and Kabbalah in the Middle Ages. The editor of the printed edition notes that this citation is full of errors and that he copied it from the original text. I have translated this passage from the printed edition of Vital consulting the Jerusalem reprint of *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*.

I found this in the writings of Rabbi Eleazar of Garmiza.⁶¹ When it is written *temunah* (image) it means that all you saw was a voice (*kol*) (Deuteronomy 4:12). One who receives this vision should contemplate the notion of corporeality that is mentioned regarding God in the Torah and contemplate the notion of "passing" and "standing," as it is written, *And God passed by before him and stood with him there* (Exodus 34:5, 6) and all the other verbs describing divine movements. With what I described regarding the image of the human, a wise person can understand that a *zaddik gamur* is worthy to prophesy and will live forever for it is like a kind that finds its own kind (*min be-mino*) and is awakened . . .⁶²

Rabbi Judah Hayyat discussed this in his commentary to the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* (Structure of Divinity).⁶³ This Kabbalah is founded on two principles. The first is that the form (*temunah*) of the divine name is called *atarah* (crown) because it is like a mirror (*aspaklaria*) that receives from all other mirrors that are set upon it.⁶⁴ There are seven chambers in this mirror, one chamber for each attribute (*middah*), and no human being has ever ascended beyond these seven. Each prophet occupies the chamber that is appropriate to his prophetic level. Moses ascended all of these levels.⁶⁵ Moses apprehended the chamber of [divine] will. On him it is written . . . *and he beholds the likeness* (*temunah*) *of God* (Numbers 12:8). Nothing from any of the seven chambers

61. It seems this reference is to Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (1175–1238), *Sefer Rokeah* (Jerusalem, 1967), 22. See in Wolfson 1996, 222. Rabbi Eleazar was from the circle known as the German pietists. He was both a Talmudist and a Kabbalist. His most well known works were the *Sefer Rokeah*, first published in Pano in 1505, and his commentary to the *Sefer Yezeriah*, first published in full in Przemyśl in 1889. I am not sure which text this citation comes from in the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*. In his introduction to the first printing of Abulafia's *Sefer Ha-Heshek*, the editor Martityahu Safran notes that Abulafia's Kabbalah is based on the writings of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. See *Sefer Ha-Heshek* (Jerusalem, 1999), 8.

62. The principle of *min be-mino* means various things in rabbinic literature. In discussions of dietary laws we read that two selfsame elements, one permitted and one forbidden (e.g., untithed wheat mixed with tithed wheat), make the mixture prohibited even in the smallest amount, whereas two different elements (e.g., untithed wheat mixed with tithed barley) is only prohibited if the untithed grain gives recognizable taste to the mixture. See, for example, Mishna Halah 3:10; Orlah 2:6; Birurim 3:10. The idea that two selfsame elements do not constitute an interruption can be found in b.T. Sukkah 37b and Zevahim 110a. Here it appears to mean that the *zaddik gamur* has found his source and is thus awakened to experience the source of his perfected state. The notion of him "living forever" is interesting here. Whether it is simply euphemistic or points to some notion of Jewish *theosis* is unclear. The question of *theosis*, here the divinization of the contemplative, is a complicated story of Kabbalism. The notion of a human being transformed into pure spirit has its roots in the inter-testamental literature such as the similitudes in the book of Enoch, 4 Ezra, and other sources. While these sources do not inform medieval Kabbalah in any direct way, we can find gestures toward these ideas in Abulafia's Kabbalah. For differing views on this idea in Kabbalism, see Wolfson 2000b, Idel 2007.

63. Hayyat's commentary *Minhat Yehudah* appears in most editions of the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*. The *Minhat Yehuda* was in many ways a more important text than the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*. Hayyat's work was one of the most important works that transmitted Spanish Kabbalah to Italy. See, for example, Idel 2011a, 212–17. Vital's use of Hayyat here may also speak to the ways in which he wants to bring together the theosophical Kabbalah of Spain (which Hayyat represents) with the prophetic Kabbalah of Abulafia. Hayyat is openly critical of Abulafia at the conclusion of his introduction to the *Minhat Yehuda*, calling his work nonsense and warning his reader not to read his books. As has been argued, Abulafia seems to stand in the center of this fourth part of the *Shuarei Kedusha*. For Hayyat's remarks on Abulafia, see *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut 'im Perush Hayyat*, 3b.

64. On this mirror (*aspaklaria*) as a term describing prophecy, specifically the prophecy of Moses, see Yalkut Shimoni to Leviticus, 1:432, and Midras Yalkut Shimoni to Hosea, 12: 538. In Kabbalah see *Zohar* 1:141a, 2: 23b, and 2:228a, among many other references. In Lurianic Kabbalah, see *Eitz Hayyim* 6:5, 6, 8:5, 32:1, 35:2, 42:13, 47:6.

65. The notion of Moses's superior prophecy is based on Deuteronomy 34:10 and codified in Maimonides's "Laws on the Foundations of the Torah," *Mishneh Torah*, volume 1, chapter 7. See Kreisel 2001, 148–315.

was hidden from Moses. Just as in a conventional mirror one can see one's own form, so too in this supernal mirror (*aspaklaria*) that is called "the form of God" (*temunah*) each one gazes into it and understands his specific attribute in that chamber, all according to his level of perception. One person sees this through a barrier (*mebiza*), while another only sees it through two barriers, and another through three. In general, the number of barriers is determined by one's level of perception. One who is aided by his soul and whose inner senses are purified does not require more than a thin barrier of separation to gaze at the "shining mirror" (*aspaklaria ha-meira*) that resembles the burning sun. However, one who has the "eyes of a bat" requires many barriers to gaze upon this light because he cannot take in too much light at once, and he will become blind if he gazes at this great light without many barriers.⁶⁶ Moses, however, did not require any barrier, as it says, *He gazed upon the divine form* (Numbers 12:8).⁶⁷ It seems that these two kinds of prophecy (one through barriers and one without) is already hinted at in the prophet Hosea when he says, *When I spoke to (lit., on; 'al) the prophets; for I granted many visions* (Hosea 12:11). If we focus on the word 'al (on) we can ask that the verse should have said, *When I spoke to ('im) the prophets*. The use of the word 'al hints at the first type of prophecy that is superior to all others and is called a "mirror that shines" (*aspaklaria nehorah*). This is only found in Moses, the master of all prophets upon whom it is said, *And God spoke to Moses face to face* (Exodus 33:11) and, *With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of God* (Numbers 12:8).

The second type of prophecy is transmitted in parables, riddles, and images that the prophet imagines. If that prophet is weak in his capabilities, the parables and imaginings are intensified. This is because this prophet requires many barriers, as I explained. This is hinted at when the verse says, *I granted many visions* (Hosea 12:11). This refers to a mirror that does not shine (*aspaklaria sh-eyno meira*; i.e., a mirror that does not emanate its own light). The word in Hosea "vision" (*hazon*) teaches this; similar to the use of *hazon* in *A harsh vision (hazon) was announced to me* (Isaiah 21:2). This is also the case with Abraham before he circumcised himself. Of him it is said, *Sometime later the word of God came to Abraham in a vision* (Genesis 15:1). *And by means ('al yad) of the prophets I used imaginings* (Hosea 12:11). That is, by means of many or fewer barriers. The use of parables and riddles in the prophets correspond to the spiritual prowess of each prophet. The term *yad* [lit., hand, but also, by means of] is taken from the verse, *but if he does not have sufficient means ('im lo mazah yado)* (Leviticus 25:28).⁶⁸

The second principle is the notion that the divine name, including its emanation, is the human.⁶⁹ The human is also the essential component of the divine chariot. And the corporeal human (*adam takhon*; humankind) is the seat of the supernal divine *anthropos* (*adam ha-ehyon*). The physical limbs in the corporeal human point to (*romzim*; lit., hint) the spiritual limbs above that have divine power. It is not for naught that the Torah says, *Let us make man in our image* (Genesis 1:26).⁷⁰ After we determine that this "image" (*temunah*) in the verse is the image of the divine *anthropos* and that the prophet is the corporeal human who, during prophecy, is almost transformed into a spiritual being, his physical senses dissipate; when he sees the image of a human it is like he sees the image in a glass mirror. However, not every prophet sees the same thing; everyone sees according to his own spiritual organ from which the soul of the prophet was emanated. Moses apprehended all dimensions of that image, as it says, *And he gazed upon the image of God* (Numbers 12:8).

It is written [in Hayyat's commentary]: In Menahem Recanati's (1250–1310) *Recanati 'al Ha-Torah*⁷¹ it is written: Contemplate this great secret I am about to reveal to you regarding the rabbinic teaching that the patriarchs died with a kiss (b.T. Baba Batra 17a). When the righteous enter into states of contemplation and engage in lofty secrets, they visualize (*medamin*; lit., imagine) with their imaginative faculties as if the things they imagine are engraved right before their eyes. When their souls become tied to the supernal soul, things increasingly become revealed on their own, like one who opens a faucet, resulting in water pouring in an uncontrolled manner. The connected thought is the source, the pool, and the running spring. This is why connecting one's thought to something evil is worse than the sin itself, as our sages teach, "The thought of sin is worse than sin" (b.T. Yoma 29a). The sages teach further that when Ben Azai was sitting and expounding on the Torah and a fire was swirling around his head, Rabbi Akiva approached him and said, "Ben Azai, what is going on (lit., why is this day different than all others)? I heard you sit and study and fire blazes around you. I thought in my room that perhaps the chariot has descended." Ben Azai replied, "We see that the Torah is likened to fire, as it says, *These are My words, like fire* (Jeremiah 23:29). I sit and study, and things descend and rejoice in my presence."⁷² The reason is that when his [Ben Azai's] soul is bound to the supernal soul, lofty things are engraved in his heart and he imagines them as if someone is putting the words in his mouth. When one achieves a state where one's thought is bound in the world of emanation (the highest of the four worlds), the emanation from that lofty place descends upon one and things

69. This point in particular is developed in the third part of *Shaarei Kedusha*. Whether this only applies to the divine *anthropos* (Adam Kadmon [original man]) or also to the corporeal human is not specified here. However, the latter seems also to be the case, given that Vital is speaking here about the unitive process of contemplation where the elemental components (the names of God) of the human body return to their supernal source.

70. This literal rendering of Genesis 1:26 is a classic Kabbalistic move that severs it from the medieval philosophical tradition. For Maimonides metaphorical reading of Genesis, see his *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:1. On the history of *zelem Adam* (image of God), see Lorberbaum 2004.

71. *Seder Recanati* (Jerusalem, 1961), 37d 38b, Recanati was one of the most important Italian Kabbalists in the fifteenth century. His Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah, finished in 1523, exemplified Kabbalah in that period in Italy. See Idel 2011a, 106–38.

72. See Midrash Leviticus Raba 16:4 and Song of Songs Raba 1:53.

66. As a nocturnal creature, the bat was thought to have eyes very sensitive to light. Some even believed that bats were blind. In fact, bats are not blind and have highly developed vision, although they do not use their eyes but sound waves to navigate direction.

67. On this see b.T. Berakhot 7a.

68. Distinguishing between the prophecy of Moses and all other prophets is commonplace and rooted in Maimonides' discussion in the *Mishneh Torah* and more in depth in his *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:32–48. For additional sources in Maimonides writings, see Kreisel 2001, 157–209. What is distinctive here is the way that Vital uses the Maimonidean discussion to speak not about prophecy but about contemplative experience. Using the template of prophecy to speak about mystical experience is very much in line with Abraham Abulafia's teachings, which is why Abulafia's work is sometimes called "prophetic Kabbalah." See Idel 1988a, 73–178.

begin to multiply, and through the joy that ensues things are revealed to one. This is what the sages mean when they say, "The *shekinah* does not dwell upon one who is depressed . . . but only in a place of joy" (b.T. Shabbat 30b). (Perhaps this joy overwhelmed him so much that he began to cry until his soul desired to leave his body. This is the notion of "death by a kiss" that teaches of the deep connection of the object of love. At that instant his soul becomes united with the *shekinah*. Thus we find in the *Zohar* at times when secrets are revealed that a sage will rise and begin to cry, sometimes so profusely that he faints [*aseifat nishmato*], as it says [regarding the biblical Jacob], *he drew [veydasef] his feet into the bed* [Genesis 49:33]. If these secrets are placed on his heart, his spirit [*ruho*] and soul [*nishmato*] will be drawn up).⁷³

Know that thought spreads forth and ascends [only] to the place of its origin. When it reaches its destination, it stops and cannot ascend further. This can be likened to a spring that rushes forth from a mountain. If one would make a dam to prevent the water from flowing, the water could only return to the place where it emerged and no further. Thus one who forces one's thought [to places it should not go] will be damaged in one of two ways: either one will become confused and destroy the body; or by attempting to force one's thought to bind itself to something it cannot apprehend, one's soul will separate itself from the body and return to its source [i.e., one will die]. This is what the sages mean when they say, "That which is beyond you, you should not seek out" (Hagigah 13a). Hence the early pietists (*hasidim rishonim*) only ascended to their place of origin, which resulted in prophecy whereby the prophet would contemplate and direct his heart to bind itself to its place of origin above. By this means the prophet was able to know the future. And this is the meaning of *You shall serve Him and cleave to Him* (Deuteronomy 10:19) and *cleave to him* (Deuteronomy 10:13).

n—The philosophers say the following regarding prophecy: It is not unusual that an individual can see visions while he is awake like the visions of a dream. This is all possible through the nullification of feeling external stimuli in a wakened state by imaging the forms of the letters of the YHVH that stand before him. Sometimes he may hear a voice, wind, speech, thunder, and all manner of noise. He may also see many images, smell with his olfactory sense, taste with all his powers of taste, and touch with all his powers of touch. He also may float in the air. All this may happen as long as the letters remain before his eyes and he remains enveloped in their color. This is called the "deep slumber of prophecy" (*tirdamat ha-nevuah*). When the visions of God's glory depart from him, so will prophecy.

v—Rabbi Moses Nahmanides writes in his *Sha'ar Ha-Gamul* (Gate of Reward): The sages teach that God will make a circle for the righteous in the Garden of Eden and God will sit among them (b.T. Ta'anit 31a).⁷⁴ This alludes to the pleasure and reward in the future during the

resurrection of the dead. The *shekinah* is seen as if it points a finger from this circle, which is an apprehension of the spiritual levels and the pleasure of solitude derived from physical pleasure. This is to say that these individuals will reach the spiritual level of Moses, our teacher, whose soul so dominated his body that his physical powers were nullified, whereby he was continually enveloped in the Holy Spirit such that his sight and hearing were purely from his soul and not the physical eye. This was the case with the other prophets only occasionally when their bodies became depleted and their souls transcended their bodily power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.⁷⁵ And the soul will see what [the angels] Michael and Gabriel saw. This is the true seeing and the true hearing. The heretical philosophers (lit., those who nullify our Torah) do not have convincing arguments to undermine our claims that Gabriel has real eyesight or hearing, which is called an apprehension that he receives from Michael. Our sages teach, "All the souls speak to one another" (b.T. Berakhot 18:b). This does not mean literal speech but rather the transmission of knowledge. (We have thus completed our task of explaining the secrets of prophecy and the visions of angels).

—Nahmanides writes in his *Commentary to the Torah*:⁷⁶ "Everything that is written regarding the vision or speech of an angel is all in a vision or dream because angels do not have physical senses. Thus experiencing an angel is not considered prophecy."⁷⁷ Rather, such a vision is called "a revelation of the eyes." But in places where angels are mentioned as humans, such as in *Behold Abraham saw three humans before him* (Genesis 18:2), that is not even a vision but rather the "honor [of God]" that was created as angels. This is called by those who know these matters "the garments of the angels."⁷⁸ This can be seen even by those whose senses are still rooted in their physical being if their souls are pure enough, such as the pious and the disciples of prophets.

In Nahmanides's *Commentary to the Torah* in the portion of Balak it is written:⁷⁹ The angels of God are called "separate intellects," they cannot be seen in a physical manner because they have no physical existence. When they were "seen" by prophets or those with the Holy Spirit such as Daniel, they were apprehended with a sight rooted in the soul/intellect [perhaps "the mind's eye"] when that individual had achieved a prophetic state or the lower state of the Holy Spirit.

In Nahmanides's *Commentary to the Torah* in the portion of Re'eh it is written:⁸⁰ *If a prophet arises among you* (Deuteronomy 13:2). It is likely that this verse refers to the following truth:⁸¹ There are certain individuals who have prophetic potential to tell the future, but they do not

75. On the distinction between Moses and the other prophets in this regard, see Maimonides, "Laws on the Foundation of the Torah," *Midneh Torah*, volume 1, chapters 6 and 7.

76. Nahmanides on Genesis 18:1 in *Ramban 'al Ha-Torah*, C. Chavel ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1959), 1:104.

77. This is contesting the position of Maimonides. See Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:41. Vital abbreviates Nahmanides's words here where Nahmanides explicitly criticizes Maimonides.

78. This term appears in a few other Kabbalistic works, for example, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Skhlov (a disciple of the Vilna Gaon) in his *Raza De-Heimannuta* included in *Kitzei Ha-Rav Menahem Mendel of Skhlov* (Jerusalem, 2001), 1:10a; and Rabbi Joseph Shlomo del Medigo in his *Mazref le-Hokhma* (Warsaw, 1890), 108.

79. Nahmanides on Numbers 22:23 in *Ramban 'al Ha-Torah*, 2:290.

80. Nahmanides on Deuteronomy 13:2 in *Ramban 'al Ha-Torah*, 2:404.

81. The use of the term "truth" in Nahmanides often alludes to a Kabbalistic understanding. See, for example, Idel 1983; Wolfson 1989.

73. This bracketed section is added by the editor of Recanati's *Sefer Recanati*, 38b. The notion of "death by a kiss," which is how the Torah described Moses's death, is a central motif in Spanish and Italian Kabbalah. Moshe Idel claims that this notion of "death by a kiss" as describing "the cleaving of the individual soul to the supernal soul" was not known to Spanish Kabbalists before Recanati (Idel 2011a, 115). Both mystical death and the act of crying as fostering mystical experience are ideas common in classical Kabbalah. See, for example, Fishbane 1994 and 1995; Wolfson 1995.

74. Nahmanides's "*Sha'ar Ha-Gamul*" in "*Torat Ha-Adam*," *Kitzei Ramban*, C. Chavel ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 2:299.

know where these powers come from. They seclude themselves and the Holy Spirit comes upon them and tells them such and such will happen to this person in the future. The philosophers call this individual a Ka'hin (soothsayer). They have no idea how this happens but it does indeed happen. Perhaps the soul (*nefesh*) of the person attaches itself to one of these separate intellects. And this person is the one called a prophet (in the preceding verse).

קכ—The Secret of Prophecy:⁸² First the contemplative sees a vision and his power increases toward knowing its origin. His spirit is tied above and is then drawn downward. At first, he thinks of exoteric reasons and then slowly he thinks of the esoteric ones. This requires white glass in order that the material realm will not impede the prophetic apprehension.⁸³ The secret of the visionary (*hoze'eh*) is in the strengthening of the power of the north; the secret of the seer (*zofeh*) is in the strengthening of the power of the south. This is all in accordance with the individual and the context (lit., time). The secret of the soothsayer (*ro'eh*) is in the strengthening of the in-between. All of the aforementioned are called prophets, for their prophecy is from their lips and they bring the future into the present from the spirit that rests upon them. The prophets contain two types of spirit, for a vessel is needed to pour into a vessel. This is how prophecy works. Sometimes when the soul is dreaming it sees dreams, sightings, and visions. And it hears voices and murmurings that are concealed in the soul. And fools are given this type of prophecy, which does not come from them but from the strength of the dreaming soul. Wise ones will seek to find the experience at its source but will sometimes be unsuccessful. Working in this manner a spirit from above will rest upon them in order to make known to them the truth of the matter. Those who do not know how to distinguish between the true and false way are subject to another spirit that will cause them to err. This is like the spirit of *navot* that is mentioned in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 22:23).⁸⁴ Sometimes there is true prophecy, but the prophet does not recognize it, such as Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh being destroyed (Jonah 3:4). The truly enlightened one must purify his body and separate from all manner of defilement, clean his hands, as it says, *with clean hands* (Psalm 24:4). He must refine his heart, as it says, *with a pure heart* (Psalm 24:4). Only then will he be able to carry prophecy which is a blessing in itself, as it says, *And portions were served to them before him, but Benjamin's portions were several* (Genesis 44:34). Jerusalem is called, *The burden of the Valley of Vision* (Isaiah 22:1); in it he (Benjamin) will have his portion. This is also similar to, *The burden of the word of God* (Malachi 1:1).

קכא—In the *Sha'ar Ha-Kavvanot* (Gates of Intention) according to the early Kabbalists:⁸⁵ "Everyone who earns something on his own will retain what he has earned."⁸⁶ So too if you pray or intend to achieve something in a true manner, you should imagine yourself as a light that is surrounded

by light from every corner. In the midst of that light is a throne of light and upon it is the light of *nogah* (splendor). Opposite it is a throne and upon it is a light called the "light of goodness."⁸⁷ When you stand between these two thrones, if you want to take revenge, turn to the light of *nogah*; if you want to be merciful, turn to the light of goodness.⁸⁸ Open your lips opposite the throne and then turn to the right and you will find *hod* (majesty), which is the light of *bahir* (illumination); on the left you will find the light of *hadar* (glory), which is the light of *mazhir* (shining). Between them and above them you will find the light of *kavod* (honor) and around them you will find the light of *hayyim* (life), and above that *keser* (crown). This is the light that crowns those who seek knowledge, sheds light on the imagination, and enlightens the vision out of the completeness of God's honor, will, and blessing. Peace and prosperity come to those who guard the path of God's unity. God hides Godself and reproves the recalcitrant to those who turn from the way of light. One who strives toward knowing the truth should cleave one's thoughts and will that are derived from the strength of his dream without measure. Through the power of drawing down the strength of his intention, one's willful knowledge, the imagined quality of his thoughts, and the force of his power of inquiry when one is not disturbed will also strengthen one's ability to draw from *eyn sof* and will result in success in all his spiritual endeavors. He will learn how to marginalize the limited nature of his will from its essence and his intention will overpower theirs. He will be able to think deeply in order to undermine the distorted path and renew the path of his proper will. He will be able to overpower those limited forces using the complete honor (*kavod*) that is drawn from the supernal light, a light that has no image, form, quality, measure, length, breadth, value, or finitude; a light that cannot be investigated, a light that has no number, no end, and no limit.

Thus when one rises from one level to the next according to the power of one's concentration with the intention of reaching *eyn sof*, one must [constantly] direct one's concentration toward this end such that the supernal will can envelop one's own will. It is not only that one's will should be enveloped in the divine will [but also the divine will should be enveloped in one's will]. Divine effluence does not descend into the human realm unless one is scrupulous in remaining proximate to the supernal will through the trait of equanimity in cleaving to divine unity. Only then will divine effluence descend to complete the contemplative's task. The perfection of one's will in its proximity to the supernal will is not only for its own sake. When the supernal will attaches itself to one's desire or will, by means of this equanimity it reveals that which was heretofore concealed. In this manner of proximate wills [divine and human], the supernal will adds strength to the object allowing it to complete any task. This is true even of the *nefesh*, the portion of the soul that is not part of the supernal will.⁸⁹ On this we read, *He who earnestly seeks*

87. The "light of goodness" (*or hu tov*) is the mature light (*gadlut*) of the *kelippat nogah*, or the light vulnerable to corruption, from the side of goodness. See Hayyim Della Rosa (d. 1786), *Torat Hakham* (Salonika, 1948), 89a. Della Rosa was one of the leading Kabbalists in the first generation of the Beit El school of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, whose interpretation of the Lurianic system dominated the Sephardic world.

88. It is unclear what is intended here. According to Della Rosa, the "light of goodness" is also part of the light of *nogah*. Since the "light of goodness" is the upper sphere of *nogah*, perhaps he means that "taking revenge" refers to gazing at the lower sphere of *nogah*.

89. In Zoharic Kabbalah the soul is divided into three parts, *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *nesama*. Lurianic Kabbalah adds two more parts, *hoye* and *yehidah*. The *nefesh* is considered to be the lowest portion of the soul, the portion most closely aligned with corporality and the physical desires of the human. Its root lies in the Hebrew word "breath" (*nesima*). *Nefesh* is sometimes used to refer to one's self or one's personality.

82. This is a section of Rabbi Joseph Angelet's "Twenty-Four Kabbalistic Secrets," extant only in manuscript. See the JTSA Mic. 1915. This passage is cited and discussed in Wolfson 1996, 216–77.

83. On "white glass" and prophecy, see Vital, *Sha'arei Kedusha*, 3:3 in *Sha'arei Kedusha Ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 2005), 110; and Vital, *Shulhei R. Hayyim Vital* (Jerusalem, 1989), 14.

84. *So the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours; for the Lord has decreed disaster upon you* (1 Kings 22:23).

85. On this early Kabbalistic text, see Scholem 1981. Scholem attributed this text to Rabbi Azriel of Gerona. Wolfson thinks it was written a bit later. See Scholem 1962, 416–19; Wolfson 1996, 301.

86. I have not been able to locate this citation.

what is good pursues what is pleasing (Proverbs 11:27).⁹⁰ That is, one's ability to achieve what one desires correlates to the cleaving of one's will to the supernal will. At that time, one's desire will be enveloped in the supernal will and one can draw this to anything one wants using the powers of concentration. This effluence is drawn from "the one who crowns," who holds the secret of desire and existence, from the spirit of *hokhma* (wisdom) and *bina* (understanding) and from the strength of *da'at* (knowledge). When one is enveloped in this spirit (*hokhma*, *bina*, and *da'at*), one's intentions (*kavanato*) will become clear and manifest in actions. The effluence will be drawn from power to power, and from reason to reason, until one accomplishes what one desires. This is how to understand why the sages of old would wait one hour before commencing to pray.⁹¹ They did so in order to dispel any foreign thoughts and to focus on the proper concentrations and behaviors. They would then pray for one hour in order to articulate those concentrations linguistically. And they would wait one hour after prayer to ponder how to properly translate those concentrations, now completed, to speech and action. In their status as righteous ones (*hasidim*) their *torah* is thus fulfilled [preserved] and their deeds are fulfilled [blessed]. This is one of the ways of prophecy: one must first accustom oneself to the rising levels of prophecy. This is accomplished through the completion of these concentrations. One must concentrate on establishing these things in a deep manner and fully articulate each word that leaves one's mouth, which includes the elements of fire, air, and water, as in voice (*kol*), spirit (*ruah*), and speech (*dibur*) in a perfect union in order to form each letter fully in one's mouth.⁹² Then he will be with the King and will achieve his essence.

What follows is the right way if one wants to accomplish anything: for prayer, blessing, or its opposite,⁹³ one must [first] imagine oneself as light. And surrounding this light is a throne of light. On that throne there are the ordered forms of light, as is known. One should concentrate one's thoughts from one attribute to another in ascending order, the order in which the light was emanated until *eyn sof*. One should focus one's concentration as if one and the roots of all things are unified in a single source. This is possible because the nature of all things is to return to its source.⁹⁴ By means of unifying and enveloping one's will in this thought, one will draw down with full force what is needed to accomplish one's intentions (*kavanato*), all according to the explanation of one's speech and the signs of one's behavior when there is no thought interference. This will begin the concatenation of effluence from attribute to attribute in the

90. The NJPS TANAKH's idiomatic translation of this verse does not capture Vital's nuance. The verse uses the term *na'ar* (will) in a way to illustrate Vital's point. A more Vitalian translation might be: "He who seeks what is good will desire the [supernal] will in all things."

91. See b.T. Berakhot 32b. Cf. Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Prayer and the Priestly Blessing," 4:16.

92. The formation of the letters in one's mouth is considered a crucial part of this verbal contemplative practice as the mouth serves as a portal for the transition from thought to language (speech), which activates divine power. The production of language is the materialization of divinity in this form of contemplative Kabbalah, and thus the process of forming letters in one's mouth is part of that process. The classical tradition divides the sounds that constitute the Hebrew letters as corresponding to the "five parts of the mouth."

93. This apparently refers to bringing about a curse.

94. This is a general metaphysical principle in theosophical Kabbalah drawn from Neoplatonic teaching. All emanations seek/desire/strive to return to the source of their emanation. This is the natural state of affairs. Sin impedes this process by either (1) creating barriers preventing returning light, or (2) by forcing the source of emanation to retreat to a place that is beyond reach. The notion of "returning light" (*or hozer*) is a fundamental principle of Kabbalah at least from Moshe Cordovero to Luria and beyond. See, for example, in Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* (Jerusalem, 1972), Gate 20, chapter 10, 94d-95a; and in Lurianic Kabbalah, *Ozrot Hayyim* (Jerusalem: Makor Hayyim, n.d.) "Gate of Akudim," chapter 5, 4a/b.

order of emanation until *eyn sof*. This will establish a fitting place for what is necessary in the mercy of supplications, in all the remaining attributes from *eyn sof* to *eyn sof*.⁹⁵ At that time, one's thought will be accomplished *in actu*. When one begins to pray, whether in asking for mercy or in supplications, including all that we have mentioned, from *eyn sof* to *eyn sof*, one should concentrate on drawing down effluence from the place of the supernal fountain (lit., from the place of the fountain). Prayer (*tefila*) is the very language of drawing down. Prayer is the blessing that is sent as an emissary to the place of emanation (*azilut*). One should thus concentrate on the unity of the letters of divine name YHVH with the vocalizations that have been transmitted directly from generation to generation. First one should concentrate on the crown of the letter yod (י), which is a hint for the letters *zayin* (ז) and *ayin* (ע). The vocalized form includes all ten paths [of the *sephirot*]. Then one should concentrate on the remaining letters of YHVH, *vav* (ו) and *hey* (ה), which point to the light of wisdom (*hokhma*), which is the *telos* of cleaving to the nothingness of thought (*ayin ha-makhsava*) and the two *heys* of the YHVH since it draws by itself. This is the power of green (*yarok*) in the shape of a bucket (*dli*) that pulls (*doleh*) from the waters of creation without interruption.⁹⁶ This also includes the force of whiteness (*ha-lavan*) and the strength of red (*edom*).⁹⁷ Regarding the two *vavs*, these two hint at two arbutators in the form of a pillar, including the six lights connected to the bucket that draws them. The final *hey* of YHVH draws from the supernal fountain like something that absorbs everything like the flowing *alef* (א). (This concludes the words of the early Kabbalists from *Sha'ar Ha-Kavanot*).

Hayyim [Vital] said:⁹⁸ According to my limited understanding regarding the lights discussed previously that are situated from below to above, the "throne of light" is the *sephirah* of *malkhut* itself and the light of *nogah* that is upon it is its soul (*nesbama*). This is all one divine name (*havayah ehai*). The other throne is *yesod* and its soul is the "good light." From there upward it is not necessary to mention any throne but only the lights themselves that are souls and called *havayot*⁹⁹ because the thrones were already mentioned in the first two cases; these are the "light of illumination" (*bahir*), which is the *havayot* of *nezah*, and the "light that shines" (*mazbir*), which is the *havayot* of *hod*. The "light of honor" (*kavod*) is the *havayot* of *riferet*. The "light of life" (*or ha-hayyim*) is the *havayot* of *bina*. It is also possible that the [light] of life includes *hokhma* and *bina*. The "light that crowns" (*makhtin*) is the *havayot* of *keter*. We still need to know that all of these *havayot* have specific vocalizations, but I do not know them because the later Kabbalists have a different way of ordering the vocalizations of the ten *havayot* of the ten *sephirot* from what appears in the *Tikkune Zohar* (*tikun* 70).

95. This term "from *eyn sof* to *eyn sof*" appears numerous times in this text, cited earlier in the early *Sha'ar Ha-Kavanot* text. Its source is not known to me. One possibility is that *malkhut* is sometimes viewed as containing *eyn sof*. This is explicit, for example, in the eighteenth-century Kabbalist Rabbi Yaakov Koppel of Mezritch (Ukraine) in his *Sha'arei Gan Eden*. On this see Magid 2012.

96. On red and green light, see Vital, *Shivbei R. Hayyim Vital* (Jerusalem, 1989), 5.

97. On the role of colors in Kabbalistic contemplation and therapy, see Hallamish 1999, 145-46; Idel 1994.

98. It seems that because this portion of the text is replete with quotations from earlier sources, Vital introduces this section with "Hayyim said" to indicate that what follows is his own voice.

99. It seems that Vital refers to souls here as manifestations of (divine) names, with *havayot* referring to the Tetragrammaton or the name YHVH. In Lurianic Kabbalah all divine manifestations, be they *sephirot*, combinations of *sephirotic* clusters (*parzufim*), among others, are often referred to as *havayot*, manifestations of the divine name YHVH. See, for example, *Zohar Haikah* 87b: "The entire Torah is only names of God."

ג'—I found in Nahmanides's *Iggeret Ramban* something regarding the union of husband and wife:¹⁰⁰ Behold look at these concealed matters that appear in the Talmud. The rabbis taught, Ben Azai was sitting and studying surrounded by fire. Rabbi Eliezer was sitting and expounding (Torah) and horns of light shone from his head like the horns of light of Moses.¹⁰¹ Know that all these things refer to the same thing. When the supernal spring is drawn down from its elevated place to a lower place, its water has the power to rise to another elevated place juxtaposed to the place of its origin. It is well known among the Kabbalists that human thought originates in the Soul Intellect (*nefesh sichlilit*) that is drawn from the higher spheres. This thought has the power to separate (from the individual) and return to its roots. It then cleaves to its place of origin in the Higher Light creating a unity between itself and its source. When this thought subsequently returns to its place below, it does so in the image of one line (*kav ehad*) and that supernal light is drawn down with it. The force of the thought that draws down the Higher Light also draws with it the *shekinah*. At that time the "light of illumination" (*or ha-bahir*) is drawn down and covers the place where the thinker sits. This is how the ancient pious ones were able to achieve this state of cleaving and were subsequently blessed according to the power of their thought. This is the meaning of the verse, *The jar of flour did not give out* (1 Kings 17:16) and *a jar of water* (1 Kings 19:6) of Elijah. And I will pour the oil of Elisha (2 Kings 4:5–7).

After these things the sages were compelled to say the following: When a husband and wife engage in sexual union and the husband's thoughts cleave to the higher realm, that thought draws down the supernal lights that dwell in that drop of semen upon which the husband concentrates, like [Elisha's] jar of oil. Thus the drop of semen becomes connected to the light of illumination that is the secret meaning of the verse, *Before I created you in the womb I knew you* (Jeremiah 1:5). This is because the light of illumination was already connected to the semen of that righteous person at the time of union due to the contemplative nature of his thought that was attached to the supernal realm, which drew down the light of illumination [into the drop of semen that inseminated the woman]. Understand this well and you will understand the great secret regarding "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."¹⁰² This also applies when the righteous engage in eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, and other physical matters. The sages asked the question, "What will become of Torah?" (b.T. Kiddushin 66b). The answer lies in the fact that the patriarchs acted purely (*le-shem shamayim*) in all of their physical behavior. Their thoughts were not severed from the supernal light even for an instant. Hence Jacob merited twelve sons who were all righteous without blemish. They were all worthy of being vessels of God. This is because Jacob's thoughts were in a constant state of cleaving with the upper worlds, even during sexual union. Understand this well. On this King Solomon said in one of his most potent proverbs, *In all your ways know Him* (Proverbs 3:6). The sages say on, *In all your ways know Him*, even in the most mundane aspects of human behavior.¹⁰³ You already know that the term "know" refers

to the union of the Soul Intellect with the upper spheres and also to the union of husband and wife. You also know that we do not consider a person truly "knowing" something until there is a union between the subject and the object known.¹⁰⁴ Understand this well. Thus think deeply about the verse, *In all your ways know Him*. Depend on it and *He will make your paths straight* (Proverbs 3:6). If one lives in this way, the supernal light will always be bound to one's actions and one's priorities will always be in proper order. This is what the sages mean when they say, "And all of your actions should be for the sake of heaven" (Mishna Avot 2:2).

After you know all this, reflect on the rabbinic dictum "thoughts of sin are even more challenging than sin itself" (b.T. Yoma 29a).¹⁰⁵ When a person thinks about sinful things, his mind and soul become embedded in the dross of the supernal realm. Since his soul is by definition bound to heaven, the dross of heaven defiles it. However, if he actually commits the sin in this world in a thoughtless manner, the punishment is lighter than the thought of sin. On the latter, he becomes bound to the upper worlds and comes closer to heresy. Here you can better understand thoughts as sin during sexual intercourse. In such a case, that thought embeds itself in the semen and creates a foundation of evil that is called *zarim* (evil ones). On this we read, *The wicked (zaro) are defiant from birth* (Psalm 58:4). If you aspire toward righteousness, understand the implications described here. With this key you will also understand the story of the pious one who sat at the gates of the ritual bath (b.T. Baba Mezi'ah 84b).¹⁰⁶

Know that because the pious cleave their thoughts to the supernal reality, everything they think or contemplate comes to pass, whether good or bad. This is what the sages meant when they wrote, "He cast his eyes upon him and he became a pile of bones" (b.T. Berakhot 58a). And we also read, "And he told her, 'Return to dust'" (b.T. Ta'anit 24a). Further we read, "Everything that the sages turned their gaze upon, either death or poverty followed" (b.T. Moed Katan 17a). This also relates to prayer and animal sacrifices in the secret of cleaving to the supernal realm. This also relates to the episode of Balaam the villain (Numbers 22–24), upon whom it was said, *He whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed*. (Numbers 22:6). Thus he wanted to consider Israel carefully in order to bind his thoughts to the supernal realms and drawn down evil tidings upon them. Hence it is written, *Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped according to tribes* (Numbers 24:2). He needed to be scrupulous and thus we read [regarding Balak], *Come now, I will take you to another place* (Numbers 23:27). This is because a villain must carefully consider the one upon whom he intends to bestow a blessing or a curse. He binds his thoughts above with the intention of drawing down from the supernal fountain. This is the meaning of . . . *he who holds visions of the Almighty* (Numbers 24:4). The villain also needs actions. Thus Balaam asked for seven altars to be built and a bull and a ram to be sacrificed on each. This was all in order for him to summon energy and his thought in order to accomplish his evil intent. Hence

100. The reference is to chapter 5 of *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* (Holy Epistle) that is included in *Kutvei Ramban*. C. Chavel ed., 2:331–35. This epistle was attributed to Nahmanides (Ramban), but today scholarly opinion claims that it was not authored by Nahmanides but perhaps by one of his disciples.

101. *Pirkei de-Rabbe Eliezer with the commentary of R. David Luria* (Jerusalem, 1990), 2:4.

102. This is the doctrinal patriarchal proclamation that serves as the standard location in traditional Jewish liturgy. It also serves as the classic expression of biblical monotheism, for example, in Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*.

103. See *Midrash Shokher Tov* to Psalm 119.

104. On this see Moshe Cordovero's *Or Ne'erau* (Jerusalem, 1999), part 6, 42–55.

105. Compare this to Jesus's teaching recorded in Matthew 5:27, *And you have heard the words of Exodus, "Do not commit adultery." Yet I say, if a man looks at a woman with lust, he has already slept with her in his heart.*

106. The Talmudic discussion reads as follows: Rabbi Yohanan used to sit by the gate of the bath, so that when the daughters of Israel would return from taking their ritual bath (after which they can have sex with their husbands), they should meet him, and bear children like to him in beauty and scholarship. And when the rabbis asked: Are you not afraid of an "evil eye"? He answered, I am a descendant of the children of Joseph, and no "evil eye" can do harm to them; as it is written "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by the eye" (Genesis 49:22).

it says, *And he [Balak] took him [Balaam] to field of zofim* (from the word "to gaze") (Numbers 23:14) so that he [Balaam] could gaze upon them and drawn down his evil intent from above.¹⁰⁷

I will now write a brief summary of what is written in Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei Orah* (Gates of Light):¹⁰⁸ Know that even though we say that achieving a desired end requires contemplation of specific divine names related to that desire, we do not mean to say that one should only contemplate the name and nothing more. Rather, one should contemplate the name related to that thing and focus on drawing down its supernal source that is called "divine will" (*razon*). One's contemplative focus should move from one *sephirah* to another until it reaches *eyn sof*, which is the upper point of the letter *yud* (י) of the YHVH.¹⁰⁹ When one reaches there, one should make one's request from that place of divine will and then draw down that divine will into this world until it reaches its earthly domain, which is represented by the divine name *Adonai* (אדני).¹¹⁰ In this manner all of the *sephiroth* are blessed through one's contemplation, and one will subsequently be blessed by them. At the outset one should concentrate on elevating [one's desire] upward to enable the name *adonai* to penetrate the final "H" of YHVH. One should then continue upward until one reaches *eyn sof* [the upper point of the letter *yud*] and make one's request there, as we explained. From there one should descend to the name *Adonai*.

Regarding the names *nezah*, *hod*, and *tiferet*, Gikatilla wrote: This is the secret of elevation of the *sephiroth* and their unification until they reach the desired place. It is like one who wants to grasp on to and bind oneself to the supernal light. The natural inclination of that which is lower is to rise to that which is higher.¹¹¹

Regarding the name *hokhma* he wrote: When *malkhut* rises up to *bina*, it attaches itself to *hokhma* that is also called "thought" (*makhshava*). This thought does not descend into the world but is perpetually bound to *keter* because both constitute the first letter of the YHVH, the *yud* and the upper point of the *yud*. This is the meaning of the rabbinic euphemism, "It arose in thought" (b.T. Menahot 29b). "Gazing at the throne," however, is a euphemism for descending. This is because at the outset it ascends to a high place where it receives divine effluence and then

with that same force generated by the ascension it descends and "gazes at the throne" (i.e., from a distance). Understand the depth of this process. The throne represents the seven lower *sephiroth*.¹¹²

—Rabbi Moshe de León wrote in his *Mishkan Ha-Edut* (Tabernacle of Testimony):¹¹³ When the prophet secludes himself with his prophetic wisdom to unify with the supernal forms, he ignores all matters of physicality and matters of this world. Only when he is able to achieve this level of severance from physicality does he become bound to the upper forms.

In the "Second Gate" of *Mishkan Ha-Edut* de León writes: The sustaining soul (*nefesh zomakhat*) sustains the body with the blood that circulates from it.¹¹⁴ After death and the decomposition of the body, this dimension of the soul remains. The animal soul, the source of all base thoughts, is called the "seat of desire."¹¹⁵ Upon it is written, *The person who sins, he alone shall die* (Ezekiel 18:20).

In the "Third Gate" [of the *Mishkan Ha-Edut*] Rabbi Moshe de León writes something significant about the *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neschama* (the three levels of the soul): The lowest level called *nefesh* is the soul of the four elements [fire, air, water, wind] and includes the inorganic, vegetative, animate, and human dimensions. This is all rooted in the drop of the father's semen that includes the fundamentals of his body and soul. The two higher levels of *ruah* and *neschama* are not from the father but directly from God. *Ruah* comes from divinity that is given to humans either from "the world of action" (*asiyah*) or from *malkhut*, which is also called the "feminine waters" (*mayim nukvin*). The *nefesh* comes from *tiferet* or from the side of the "masculine waters" (*mayim dekhurin*). This is the way it is explained in the section of the *Zohar* called "Saba de-Mishpatim."¹¹⁶

In the *Zohar* it is explained in a different manner. In the *Zohar*, the vital *nefesh* and *ruah* are both called *nefesh* because both are rooted in the "world of action" (*asiyah*). The *neschama* is rooted in the "world of formation" (*olam yezeriah*) and is called the "male *ruah*." The true *neschama* is from the "world of creation" (*olam ha-beriah*). In fact, both of these approaches are true. In the "First Gate" [of the *Mishkan Ha-Edut*] it is explained precisely in this way: the *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neschama* are from the lower worlds, the constellations (*galgalim*), and the world of angels. Note that all these worlds [of which we are now speaking] are contained in the "world of action" (*asiyah*). Hence the *nefesh* and *ruah* mentioned earlier are called *nefesh*, and the *neschama* is called the *ruah* of [the world of formation] *yezeriah*, which is the realm of angels, and the *neschama* is from *beriah* (world of creation).¹¹⁷ Understand that there is no discrepancy between the two

107. This paragraph exhibits the extent to which Vital believes in the potential to summon divine power even for evil purposes as well as, and as easy as, for good purposes. Using Balaam as a proof of this phenomenon is quite suggestive of the tendency among many in that circle to support the notion that good and evil are drawn from similar places. God does not seem to intervene in this regard. This use of divine powers by Gentiles also emerges in healing practices. In Talmudic literature we have numerous instances of Jews seeking out "heretics" (*minim*) because of their healing skills. See, for example, b.T. Avodah Zara 27b and Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat 14d.

108. Joseph Gikatilla (1248–ca. 1325) from Castile. He was one of the most influential Kabbalists of thirteenth century. He began as a student of Abraham Abulafia (hence his place in Vital's work here is very instructive), and his first major work *Ginot Egoz* (1615) displays a definite Abulafian influence. He then turned to theosophical Kabbalah, and his most famous work, the *Sha'arei Orah*, written sometime after 1293 and first published in 1559, is an exhaustive explanation of the *sephiroth*. For a concise biographical sketch, see Scholem 1974, 409–11. The *Sha'arei Orah* was published in a new two-volume edition edited by Joseph ben Shlomo in Jerusalem in 1970. For an English translation, see Weinstein 1995.

109. Gikatilla was one of the most prominent advocates of identifying *eyn sof* with the highest *sephirah* of *keter*. *Keter* is often placed as the upper point of the Hebrew letter *yud*. On the Kabbalistic controversy of this identification, see Green 1997.

110. The divine name *Adonai* is considered the presence of God in the world, sometimes called *malkhut*, sometimes *shekhinah*. This name is in closest proximity to the world and thus is the name that is pronounced as phonetically written to beseech divine favor.

111. *Sha'arei Orah*, Ben Schlomo ed., 1:181.

112. *Sha'arei Orah*, Ben Schlomo ed., 2:94, 95.

113. Rabbi Moshe de León was born in Castile in 1240. He was most famous for claiming to have discovered the *Zohar*. It has later been determined by scholars that he was instrumental in writing the *Zohar*. Scholarly debate continues on the role de León played in the composition of the *Zohar*. His *Mishkan Ha-Edut* (1293) was a work largely devoted to the soul after death and also contains a commentary on the vision of Ezekiel. He was the author of many other original works on Kabbalah as well. See the short biography in Scholem 1974, 432–34. Cf. Wolfson 1988.

114. On this discussion in *Mishkan Ha-Edut*, see Nadav 1959, 72–73; Bar-Asher 2011. This "sustaining soul" is close to the notion of an organic soul, for example, that which sustains all organic life, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Skhlov (eighteenth-century Lithuania) defines it as that which sustains the life of a tree. See his "Commentary to *Mishnat Ha-Edut*" in his *Kitvei R. Menahem Mendel of Skhlov* (Jerusalem, 2001), 1:165.

115. This is also called the *yezer ha-ra*, or the evil inclination.

116. See *Zohar* 2:94. On this section of the *Zohar*, see Giller 2001, 33–68.

117. This sentence is confusing because Vital, in line with Lurianic doctrine, views the categories of the soul (*nefesh*, *ruah*, *neschama*) as representing worlds (*asiyah*, *beriah*, *yezeriah*, and *azilut*), as contained within them and also within each category (*nefesh* of *nefesh*, *ruah* of *nefesh*, etc.). So while generally, for example, we can call *nefesh* the world of *asiyah*, the world of *asiyah* also contains a *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neschama* of its own. Moreover, each *nefesh* contains a *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neschama* of its own. In that case, the *nefesh* of one world can be considered the *ruah* of another world.

positions. When a person dies, the vital soul and the blood are absorbed into the other organs. When the body decomposes, the vital soul remains in the decomposed matter. Upon this it is said, *And his souls still mourns* (Job 14:22). This is the "sustaining soul." The animal soul, however, departs from the body and hovers above the grave. The remaining dimensions of the "intellectual soul" (*neshama sikhli*) rooted in the constellations of *asiab* (mentioned earlier) that are sometimes called *ruah* in relation to its foundations, dwell in the earthy (or lower) Garden of Eden. The *ruah* of *jezeriah* that is called *neshama* in relation to the "intellectual soul" dwells in the supernal (or upper) Garden of Eden.¹¹⁸

In "Part Four" of the *Mishkan Ha-Edut* it is written: We can learn from the enlightened and from the prophets that strive to understand spiritual matters how they constantly fast and weaken their bodies in all manner of ascetic behavior. It is only with the weakening of the body that the soul can be empowered.¹¹⁹ The weakening of the body is proportionate to the strength of the soul, as it is written, *Have no fear Daniel, from the first day that you set your mind to get understanding, practicing abstinence before your God, your prayer was heard . . .* (Daniel 10:12). Similarly, we read in the teachings of the sages, "One rabbi fasted forty days so that he might meet with Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai."¹²⁰ It is also the case that living righteous ones (*zaddikim*) cannot see dead righteous ones except by means of fasting.¹²¹ Evidence of this can be brought from a sick person whose animal soul is seriously weakened and can, in that state, achieve spiritual insight. In that weakened state his "intellectual soul" gains strength and can have visions of the supernal realms. This is also written in "Part Six."¹²² There de León adds, When angels temporarily descend into this world, they take human form, drawing from the four elements. Even though they are corporeal, they are only revealed to the individuals to whom they were sent.

De León also wrote the following: It is only the *ruah* [dimension of the soul] that separates from the body at death. This *ruah* is called the "intellectual soul" (*neshama sikhli*) as we explained. This is due to the destructive drop (*tipat herev*), the angel of death. The sustaining soul (*nefesh zomakhai*) and the animal soul remain in the body. Both die as a result of the drops of the angel of death.¹²³ However, they still retain a small portion of life that can be perceived in dreams. This is the meaning of "a dream is one sixtieth of prophecy" (b.T. Berakhot 57b).¹²⁴

118—In the book *Sod Ha-Kedusha* (Secret of Holiness) I have found the following:¹²⁵ A person must sanctify his limbs and mark them with *mitzvot* in order to become a throne for the *shekinah*. Human limbs are like an ark in which the *shekinah* resides.¹²⁶ All positive commandments hold the secret of sanctity, and when a person does one *mitzvah* he sanctifies himself in that particular *mitzvah*. The more *mitzvot* one fulfills the more the sanctity increases. In this case, the limbs become like the Holy Tabernacle and its sacred vessels, as it is written about them, *And I will dwell in them* (Exodus 25:8). The *mitzvah* of Torah study (*talmud torah*) is the greatest of all and represents the tablets inside the ark, which represent both the written and oral Torah.¹²⁷ These are, respectively, *tiferet* and *malkhut*.¹²⁸ All of the limbs that are in the ten *sephirot* are included in them. By this means one literally binds oneself within a true state of cleaving (*devekut*) with the *shekinah*, as it is written, *And cleave to him* (Deuteronomy 11:22).¹²⁹

119—I found something regarding the essence of prophecy: Prophecy is the effluence that flows from God through the Active Intellect through the power of speech and afterward through the imagination that constructs parables and images. Moses's prophecy, however, was not facilitated by the imaginative faculty but directly from the Active Intellect to the highest level of the human intellect.¹³⁰ Hence Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8) fasted for forty days in accordance with the forty days required to form matter to weaken their physical state in order to receive complete prophecy. The intellect stands above the lower portion of the soul (*nefesh*), which is the life force generated from the heart. The sustaining soul is generated from the liver, and the soul that directs the power of speech is from the mind.

125. It is not clear to which text Vital is referring here. Elliot Wolfson initially suggested it might be the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* (Holy Epistle) that was attributed to Nahmanides and is included in the two-volume collection of his work edited by Charles Chavel. However, he noted to me in personal correspondence that Vital refers explicitly to the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* later in the text, which problematizes that theory. Many scholars today think that the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* was written by Gikatilla. While the exact passage cited here is not found in the printed edition of the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh*, Vital could have been paraphrasing. One strike against this suggestion is that Vital does quote the *Iggeret Ha-Kodesh* by name earlier in this text. I want to thank Elliot Wolfson for his help with this textual conundrum.

126. This is likely based on Exodus 29:46, *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt that I might abide (shekhanu) among you*.

127. See Mishna Peah 1:1. The contextual meaning of the *mishna* is that Torah study is one of those *mitzvot* that has no boundary. However, in rabbinic literature and onward it is taken to mean that Torah study is equal to all the other *mitzvot* in the Torah. See b.T. Kiddushin 39b.

128. On the Tablets being *tiferet* and *malkhut*, see Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 2: "Gate 23," chapter 12, 23c.

129. There may be a subtle shift in the conventional notion of the passage in Exodus 29:46. Many understand that passage to mean that the *shekinah* dwells among the Israelites (*I will dwell among you*). Vital seems to be reversing the hierarchy. When one performs the *mitzvot*, the human body becomes bound to the *shekinah*. By juxtaposing Exodus 29:46 with Deuteronomy 11:22, Vital suggests, perhaps, that Exodus 29:46 refers to the mystical experience of a kind of apotheosis whereby the human body becomes "divinized" through its attachment to the *shekinah*.

130. The notion of Moses's prophecy as that which transcends the imaginative faculty is found in Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws on the Foundation of the Torah," chapters 6 and 7 and Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:32–48. Cf. Howard Kreisel 2001, 182–204, 210–56.

118. On the distinction between the upper and lower Garden of Eden, see Magid 1996b.

119. Asceticism is a formidable idea in classical Kabbalistic piety. See, for example, Elliot Wolfson's "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath: Erotic Asceticism/Ascetic Eroticism" in his *Language, Eros, Being* (2005). On this passage in *Mishkan Ha-Edut*, see Bar-Asher 2011, 314. Asceticism is not foreign to the Talmudic sages either. See Diamond 2004.

120. *Zohar* 1:4. Forty days is considered a full cycle for mystical experience and also repentance. This is based on Moses being in heaven forty days before returning with the tablets. See, for example, b.T. Shabbat 89a; b.T. Ta'anit 28b.

121. On the role of fasting in rabbinic asceticism, see Eliezer Diamond 2004, 93–120.

122. This actually appears in "Part Four" of the *Mishkan Ha-Edut*. I want to thank Avishai Bar-Asher for clarifying the error.

123. This may refer to the seminal drop of demonic forces.

124. The whole notion of some life remaining in the body becomes, for the Kabbalists, the condition for resurrection. The body is thus never totally devoid of life, and this imperceptible life-force remains dormant until the time of resurrection.

מ—I found a response from the book *Shaar Kevod Ha-Shem* (Gate of Divine Glory) by Ephraim ben Israel ben al-Nakawa: It is written in the works of the astronomers that there are **individuals** who can see spiritual forms in a wakened state, seeing them in bodily form. These forms speak to them and tell them the future. The reason for this is that these individuals receive divine **effluence** from above from the time of their birth. The text goes on to say: Those who see these forces in bodily form do not see them empirically. Rather, everything they see is inside of them like one who sees his form in a mirror or some clear surface. He is, in fact, seeing his own image. This is also the position held by Abraham Ibn Daud (1110–1180?) and Ravad (Avraham ben David of Posquieres; 1123–1198).

ו—In another work I found description of the *sephirotic* tree:¹³¹ Now I will explain to you the secret of “enclotment” (*malbush*). First know that the human form is an image of God (*zelem*) and God created the human that way for God’s glory, as it is written, *All who are linked to My name, whom I have created, formed and made for My glory* (Isaiah 43:7). God breathed **breath** (*neshamah*) into the human’s nostrils from above. That was stretched so that it could take the **form** of a human body. Hence the entire human body was filled with divine glory in order that it could draw down from the spirit and divine intellect, bind itself to them, and walk in the way of true wisdom. In order to illustrate that the human form is honorable, God commanded us to make the form of the cherubim in human form. And just like God breathed into our nostrils the breath from above (*neshamah elyona*; lit., the supernal soul), so did God with the **cherubim**, *tiferet* and *atarah*. Upon the Torah it is written, *The Torah of God is perfect, restoring the soul* (*nefesh*) (Psalm 19:8). That is, it is restored to the place of its origin. In this way, God does a kindness to the righteous and prepares for them a spiritual garment (*malbush*) even loftier than those of the angels. They cannot decide for themselves nor can they pray for themselves and their offspring until God enclothes them in a second garment. This second garment has **discernment**, and thus they can pray for themselves and their offspring. On this it says, “They know their own pain but they do not know the pain of others.”¹³² If the soul merits this [second] garment it can pray for itself and its offspring. We find this in [b.T.] tractate Ketubot (103a) regarding Rabbenu ha-Kodesh [Rabbi Yehuda the Prince, the second-century sage known to be **redactor** of the Mishna] who, after his death, used to return to his home every Friday afternoon [before Shabbat]. We also read of Rabbi Ahai bar Josiah (b.T. Shabbat 152b). These righteous ones were given this garment that always hovers over their grave.

ז—Regarding the secret of enclotment (*sod ha-malbush*):¹³³ After the soul is enclotched in the body in this world, and after it separates postmortem, it returns and is enclotched in a **precious**

garment that appears as an image of an astral body (*guf aviri sapiri*—a sapphire-like ethereal body). There is one who wears the garment of Elijah, a spiritual garment that remains after it has been removed from his skin [i.e., after death]. This is apparent to the pure of heart. And there are some that only appear to the pure of spirit when the soul is strong, as it is hinted at in *I slept with my fathers* (Genesis 47:30) “in body and spirit.”¹³⁴ The secret of this “body” is the foundation of the garment that is drawn from the supernal spirit. And this is what is meant by “And Jacob our father did not die” (b.T. Ta’anit 5b). This is because he was enclotched in a more perfect garment since “his bed was complete (*shelamah*).”¹³⁵ One can understand this regarding Joshua, who was described as wearing soiled clothing (Zechariah 3:4) because his children were not acting properly until, by separating from their gentile wives, his soiled clothes were removed. Jacob our father did not die because he had reached a state of perfection (*middat ha-emet*) and still stands to pray for the well-being of his children. Do not say he did so because his sons sold their brother Joseph, because Joseph had already forgiven them. Moreover, the brothers were already forgiven through their time in exile [in Egypt]. When the world needs mercy, all the patriarchs are enclotched and stand in prayer for the sake of their progeny, as is explained in a homiletic passage regarding Elijah, “Abraham was woken [from his eternal rest] and prayed” (b.T. Baba Meziyah 85b). Rabbi Hiyya and his son’s actions were similar (b.T. Baba Meziyah 85b). Perhaps they too merited the very same spiritual garments. When a person’s thoughts are bound above, he can see people that stand in these spiritual garments, according to their level of apprehension. We see this in sick people whose bodies are weakened and, as a result, their spiritual senses are heightened and they can see the image of a person in the form of an astral body, as in the passage, *Prepare a throne for Hezekiah* (b.T. Berakhot 28b), when he saw an image of what he [intellectually] apprehended. Similarly, “And they were born under one star” (b.T. Baba Batra 12b), that both were attached to the same place above. Regarding Rabbi Hiyya who said, “Do not bury me in a white shroud (lest I am not worthy and am like a bridegroom amid mourners) or a black shroud (lest I am worthy and am like a mourner amid bridegrooms), but bury me in court garments from overseas” (b.T. Shabbat 114a). This is because how one is buried will determine how one will serve God after death. Actions below have their impact on actions above. This also relates to being “buried on a mat of reeds” (b.T. Berakhot 18b). Even though one is clothed in one’s good deeds, the body should be likened to the soul. The analogy between Hiyya and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob requires further investigation. And why not bury him in a white shroud? Perhaps the court shroud is in-between (white and black) and he preferred the middle way to ascend because that was fitting for him? When he saw those who came to greet him [postmortem] and the ways in which they were dressed, Abraham being an example, he realized the principle, “The smaller follows the greater.” We can also learn of

131. This section is derived from Shem Tov Ibn Gaon’s *Keter Shem Tov*, which is reprinted in Judah Koriari’s *Meor ve Shemesh* (Livorno, 1839). I want to thank Elliot Wolfson for this source. Cf. Idel 2004, 350.

132. See Zohar 1:225a/b. This seems to be a paraphrase of a Zoharic discussion. The citation as it appears in Vital’s text does not appear in the Zohar.

133. The notion of the garment (*malbush*) is a complex and central idea in the Zohar. See, for example, Cohen-Allor 1987. This section is derived from Joseph Angelet’s *Twenty-Four Secrets*. See Bar-Asher 2014. The reproduction of the Angelet text in Vital is at the end of this essay. See also Wolfson 1980 and 1996, 276–77.

134. See Zohar 1:224. Vital slightly misquotes the passage here. In the Zohar it reads, “I slept with my fathers in the body of my *nafshu* (lower soul) and the spirit of my *neshamah* (upper soul).” Here and in other places the likelihood is that Vital is quoting from memory and thus misquotes certain passages.

135. Here “his bed” refers to his sexual activity. See Midrash Leviticus Raba 36:5. “Abraham still had impurity (*pesolet*) as he produced Ishmael and Ketura. Isaac still had impurity (*pesolet*) as he produced Esau, Jacob’s bed was complete as he produced only righteous sons.” See Margolit 1993, 2:850.

the secret of the soul according to Rabbi Eliezer Ha-Gadol in his *Orkhot Hayyim* (Paths of Life)¹³⁶ where he says the soul is en clothed in spiritual ether and how, in his majestic garments, it ascends monthly and weekly.

[illegible]

Figure 5.5. Chart of Kabbalah Letter Permutations

136. The *Orhot Hayyim* is also known as *The Testimony of R. Eliezer the Great*, which is attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus, a second-century sage. The *Orhot Hayyim* includes midrashim and pious directives. It was first published in Salonika in 1521.

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